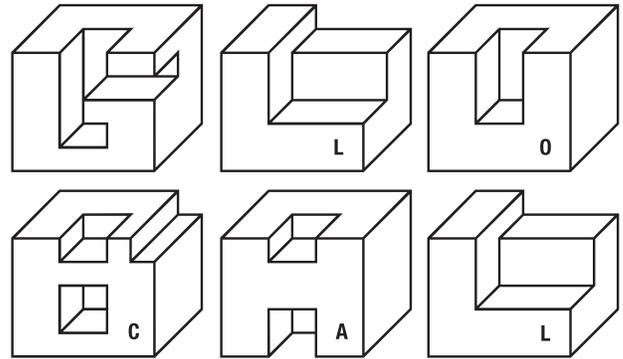


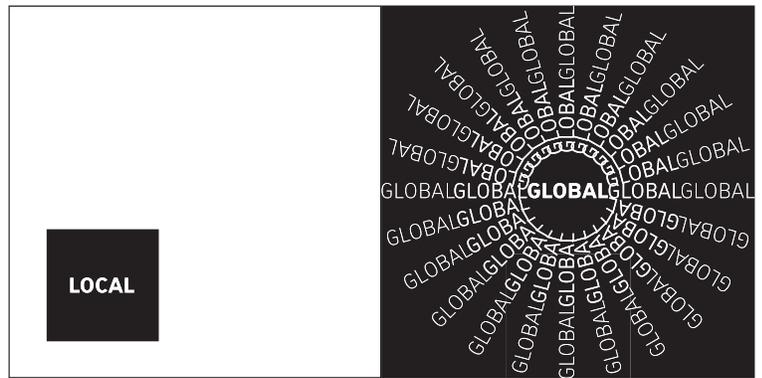
A.



B.



C.



D.

DUTCH POSTERS 1988-2008 READER

Title Lettering by:

- A. Richard Niessen
- B. Willem Henri Lucas
- C. Harmen Liemburg
- D. Wout de Vringer

Holland's renowned poster culture is an outward, visual expression of a legendary "designer's utopia." These posters display commercial and cultural information to the public, but with a level of design consideration that reflects their unique societal values. The posters reveal that sophisticated design can be supported and appreciated.

In the Netherlands, an artificial geographic setting, government funding and subsidies, and a long tradition of respect for the arts are important factors for creating a cultural environment in which graphic designers can thrive. The Dutch government subsidizes a good portion of the cultural activity in the country and thus has often been the main client for graphic designers. For example, clients such as the Dutch Postal Service and the National Bank have encouraged the development of their work by commissioning designers that cultivate unconventional design approaches. Their risks have stimulated new ideas and attitudes in Dutch design.

While the climate for design in Holland is better than in most countries, recent developments are complicating this ideal. The privatization of state-owned companies, the increasing dominance of advertising agencies over individual designers, the proliferation of the internet and text messaging as a less expensive alternative to posters, and less government funding for the arts, all reflect a huge shift in the environment that originally made these posters possible. Faced with the consequent vanishing poster culture, more designers are turning to self-generated posters as an outlet.

This exhibition is by no means a comprehensive survey, but a small snapshot meant to encapsulate a transitioning period of Dutch poster design that has taken place between 1988 and 2008. Interviews with each designer reveal influences on their design practice, as well as the recent changes and directions taken in the development of graphic design that may spell a fading poster culture in Holland.

ATRANDBM is a community sponsored public gathering of designers, artists, writers and researchers within the Los Angeles and San Francisco area. These events provide a forum for our local community to take part in a critical discussion about design and visual culture in a context unattached to any one educational, professional or disciplinary institution. There is no agenda to legitimize our occupation or provide a venue for networking. Our only goal is to instigate a stimulating dialogue and investigate design in our community through lectures, exhibitions, and other happenings.

AtRandom events have no standard configuration and manifest themselves in forms unique to each specific event and dialogue. Both large and small, real and virtual, planned and spontaneous, critical and comical, each event will provide a platform for unique voices to share their work while facilitating access to fruitful discussions.

for more information:
www.atrandom.us

AtRandom #4: Local Global/Dutch Posters 1988-2008
presented by AtRandom and Chronicle Books
Exhibition curated and organized by AtRandom: Sean Donahue & Jon Sueda

AtRandom Team: Sean Donahue, Jon Sueda, Sophine Lim, Harmen Liemburg, David Valentine, Emily Craig, Tim Belonax, and Heidi Reifenstein.

Interviews written by: Sophine Lim for the Exhibition Post More Bills, 2007. Organized by Stephanie Chen, Sophine Lim and Florencio Zavala.
Reader designed by David Valentine, Jon Sueda and Sean Donahue.

Note: Interview responses are a direct correspondence with each designer.

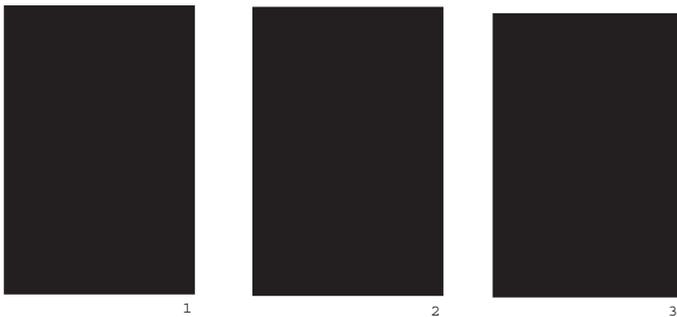
Special Thanks to Harmen Liemburg, Richard Niessen, Willem Henri Lucas, Studio Dumbar, Thomas Castro of LUST, Wout de Vringer, Bob van Dijk, Martin Venezky, Michael Carabetta, Brooke Johnson, David Valentine, Emily Craig, Tim Belonax, Heidi Reifenstein, and Chronicle Books.

Bob Van Dijk

Bob van Dijk was born in The Hague, The Netherlands in 1967.

After graduating cum laude at The Royal Academy of Art in The Hague in 1992 he started his professional career at Studio Dumbar. He won the esteemed Dutch Design Prize in 1996 for his poster-campaign for The Holland Dance Festival. In 2000 he opened his own studio, Bob van Dijk, where he designed posters for The Jetlag Discotheque and impressive illustrations for the annual report for De sociale Verzekeringsbank. During that period he also created work for Leagas Delaney working on Telecom Italia.

In 2001, with 2 partners, started NLXL: Visual Communication and Interactive Design. In 2002 NLXL was involved in the global campaign for Hewlett Packard - HP+. In 2003 they designed the graphics in the airports of Rome and Milan. Bob is now a creative director at LAVA.



1. Holland Dance Festival
69" x 47"
1995

2. Holland Dance Festival
69" x 47"
1998

3. Behind the Seen
69" x 47"
1998



4. Japan/Holland
69" x 47"
1993

5. Jetlag
33.5" x 23.5"
2000

6. Jetlag
33.5" x 23.5"
2000

People attribute unconventional Dutch design to various factors, mainly its history, tradition and respect for the arts, government funding and subsidies, and its artificial geographic setting. What kind of cultural climate allows designers to make beautiful and challenging posters that function on the street?

Holland is a sort of "Disney World" within the real world. I can say this, because of my experience of being a Dutch citizen who also had the opportunity to work and live outside of Holland. This is what really opened my mind. I realized that Holland is small, yet it has a big history. Do you know that the first real multinational company in the world was Dutch!? It was the VOC. Translated in my best English: The United East Indian Company. Big boats that were sailing all around the world doing trading. The Dutch are curious and know that the market outside Holland has always been bigger than the inner market.

With all the problems in Holland with the economy going down, we are still a rich country! We are small, don't live in time zones and can almost see the borders of our country if we stand on the roof of our houses. If a country is rich, there is always time and money for Culture. Already in the 1920s the government realized that with design you could make the difference. In a way, it all started with the government taking design seriously. If the main goal is not "how can I survive," but how can we use the space for doing things in a beautiful way? Welcome to spoiled Holland!

What are the ideas and values underneath your work that make it unique?

If you live in a sober way, and not give in to feeling the importance to wear designer clothes, live in the designer houses and tell the outside-world that you really made it.....you can be rich, without owning anything! If you can be happy THAT way, you don't have to pay many bills, which makes you more flexible to do the things that YOU really want to do. Just don't step into the traps about what luxury is. Luxury is mental freedom, that's what I think.

I am just me, but really try to make something out of what I do. Because of the fact that I don't drive a very expensive car, I can sometimes say to a client that I don't believe in their story, or that I don't feel comfortable working for them. I want to feel energy and feel the "+" effect. If you want to be a prostitute, you have to like it and I only want to be fucked by the persons that were also in my mind already. (Sorry for this way of talking, but I mean that :-))

So, if you have low cost, it is much easier to do just what you want. I went to the academy of arts to become a happy designer, not to become a slave of a client. The client should hire me because of what they want from me, not for what they want me to do for them just because they pay me.

Because of that fact, I don't have to think about how to pay my bills all the time. I can concentrate on being creative... I try to! :-)) I am interested in a lot of things... I am a collector. I make time for that, and all the time I don't have to spend paying bills, I can spend learning.

Also the fact that I do not see my "profession" as a "profession" makes it a "hobby-thing," which makes it something that comes from the heart and not because of the fact that I just have to do my job. I love my job! I am happy and feel spoiled that I am never bored and feel the energy to go on and on. It goes very natural!

Are the majority of the cultural posters created by Dutch designers for Dutch clients? Who commissions these posters?

We as Dutch are more and more working over the borders outside of Holland. The rest of the world seems to like our independent approach.

Dutch designers seem to have artistic autonomy when working with their clients. What is the client designer relationship like in Holland?

My experience in general is that it is teamwork. It is a little different for instance in Germany. The client often demands that the designer has to listen, because the client pays the bill. In Holland, the client in general, but not always, ha ha ha, respects us as a specialists, and really wants to be a part of the team instead of being a dictator!

The posters in our collection were made in the mid 90s through 2008. Has poster culture changed? If so, why? What is it like now?

The climate in Holland is a sort of changing, well it changed already! Because the digital highway is taking over, not many clients want to invest in posters the last few years. The digital world is reaching people in another way. E-mail made it possible for people not to make posters. One press on the button, and you can reach a lot of people at once... very cheap.

I am doing my own battle at the moment, telling clients that it is more "chic" to come up with posters right now because nobody invests in that at the moment. It seems to help, because everybody wants to be special. The internet gave us all a lot of fantastic things, the world became bigger and smaller. So this is not a reaction from an old school-designer, but one that understands the positivity of the digital world we live in. I see a new mentality... that is why we spend so much time on making a "good" posters. Even when the event is over, the poster can be put inside a house, and have the function of making people happy while they look at it. Like a piece of art, but still functioning even after the event. A niche-thing.

Why don't we have posters like this in the States? Why don't such posters work here?

I have seen a lot of good design in the USA. America is very money-driven, so there is less space for emotion. Also the country is SO big, that the government already has to deal with a lot of other problems than taking care of art or design. Holland is small, so if the government wants to spend money on artists, they don't have to spend so much. USA is very big and already has to deal with more problems than WE do.

Lust

Thomas Castro and Jeroen Barendse founded LUST in 1996 in The Hague, the Netherlands, with the support of an Art Grant from the Netherlands Foundation for the Visual Arts and Design. In 1999, Dimitri Nieuwenhuizen joined LUST as a partner.

Today LUST is a small studio numbering 5 designers including a revolving group of 4 interns per year. LUST works for architects and city planners, publishers, music groups, galleries, fine art institutions and various other small cultural entities, as well as some larger institutions such as Dutch Ministries and Municipalities and national museums.

For the last eight years, LUST has co-sponsored "De Program", the yearly summer workshop of American design students and professionals in The Hague. Since 1998, LUST has also co-organized the monthly design lecture series ZEFIR7 held at Theater Zeebelt in The Hague.

LUST's work consists of 40% interactive & time-based media, 40% traditional & printed media and 20% self-initiated projects.



1. **Today'sart**
90.55" x 29.53"
2005

2. **Generation Random**
19" x 26"
2007

3. **Loos Space Music Festival Poster**
39.5" x 27.75"
1999

4. **Speed Festival Poster**
Loos Time Circle Festival
1999

People attribute unconventional Dutch design to various factors, mainly its history, tradition and respect for the arts, government funding and subsidies, and its artificial geographic setting. What kind of cultural climate allows designers to make beautiful and challenging posters that function on the street?

You stated it well! Another one for that list might be that the dutch (and therefore, the clients and designers) have a certain healthy dose of disrespect for any kind of authority (call it a kind of "civil disobedience"). In the context of design, this translates to courage. Clients dare to commission different design approaches, designers dare to try different design methodologies, and the public is open to experiencing different design ideas.

What are the ideas and values underneath your work that make it unique?

Our design has always been based on "the process." "Process-design" (as this is often called) isn't merely "following a process that leads to the eventual design." This definition is valid for ALL designers: i.e. every designer undergoes a process during the course of designing a particular piece, whatever that process maybe. Our definition instead is this: we design a "process" or system that in turn designs for us – or at least, helps us design.

To this end, we use ideas such as generative systems, statistical analysis, non-hierarchical methods, and a healthy dose of understanding new technologies to develop systems that help us "process" the data (i.e. the content: text and images) of an assignment into form.

Are the majority of the cultural posters created by Dutch designers for Dutch clients?

Yes.

Who commissions these posters?

Well, cultural posters are commissioned by ... cultural clients!

Dutch designers seem to have artistic autonomy when working with their clients. What is the client designer relationship like in Holland?

In Holland, clients understand and believe in the value of design. It is part of the social order and social values that stem back to the Bauhaus and de Stijl. For example, organizations, corporations, institutes – big and small – public, private or state – all understand what design can do for them. Therefore, design is usually a relatively hefty part of their operating budgets.

The posters in our collection were made in the mid 90s through 2008. Has poster culture changed? If so, why? What is it like now?

It has changed dramatically. First of all, in Holland, as in other countries, the poster (as a form of mass public communication tool) is a dying art. Its communicative territory being encroached upon by digital media such as email and text messaging. The poster as a visual form of communication is being replaced on the street by on one hand, ad-

vertising posters which advocate lifestyle branding more than good design; and on the other hand, by cheap mass produced text heavy "announcement" style posters, such as "speedway" and "concert" events. Therefore, the graphic design poster, circa 2008, must redefine its purpose.

Why don't we have posters like this in the States? Why don't such posters work here?

I think in the end its all a matter of economic values versus artistic values. In other countries (like America) the bottom line is "salability." In these countries, even cultural clients have to answer to sponsors who demand a certain turnout to events they sponsor. This eventually leads to clients making decisions about design that are based on economic criteria rather than on artistic criteria, i.e. factors such as: will the public understand the design? Will they be shocked or be offended? Does the design appeal to a broad demographic? Is the design too avant-garde? Can the design be misconstrued? Does the design contradict the (moral) values of the sponsoring company? etc... So after all these (and more) criteria are factored in, the resulting design is, more often than not, a bland and gutless shadow of what the designer originally intended.

Of course there are exceptions to this. But typically, the exceptions produced by American designers with autonomous freedom, all end up in cultural settings (the poster wall in the lobby of a museum, or chosen to be included in a show about design, or mailed directly to the "season pass" holders of a cultural institution). Therefore, in a sense, this type of good design is usually "preaching to its own parish." Rarely would you see this type of cutting edge design on the street or in neutral public venues.

Ideally, the designer's role is to lead, shape and give form to developments in culture, instead of letting cultural developments lead them. In the end, good design is not designed in committee. It is the result of a specific artistic and cultural vision of a designer. and this is something that dutch culture understands and embraces.

Studio Dumbar

Established by Gert Dumbar in 1977, the agency, which is headed by Michel de Boer as Creative Director and Tom Dorresteyn as Strategy Director, currently employs a team of thirty staff.

Studio Dumbar specializes in full-scale corporate identity programs, in which the agency's graphic, spatial and interactive design talents are applied in concert to achieve the most discerning and persuasive result. Their clients include Apple Computer, Post Danmark (Dk), Holland Festival, KPN, Netherlands Ministry of General Affairs, Museum of Fine Arts and General Motors.



1. Zeebelt Theater
33.25" x 23.5"
1998

2. Zeebelt Poster Designed
by Martin Venezky
1993

3. Zeebelt Poster Designed
by Martin Venezky
1993

4. Zeebelt Theater
33.25" x 23.5"
1998

5. Nationale Toneel
23" x 16.5"
1998

6. Pulchri Studios
16.25" x 11.5"
2000

People attribute unconventional Dutch design to various factors, mainly its history, tradition and respect for the arts, government funding and subsidies, and its artificial geographic setting. What kind of cultural climate allows designers to make beautiful and challenging posters that function on the street?

Perhaps The Netherlands has less aggressive commercial filters?

What are the ideas and values underneath your work that make it unique?

Get to know your client well. Be aware of your professional status. Be convinced your audience are intelligent, well thinking beings.

Are the majority of the cultural posters created by Dutch designers for Dutch clients? Who commissions these posters?

Who commissions? Orchestra's, theatre groups, dance companies, museums etc. have an artistic director. The Netherlands is a small densely populated plot of land with a tremendous amount of museums, dance companies etc. packed together. It's the battle of the artistic directors. They are to make themselves visible, not only by programming but also by producing books and posters. In their staff there usually is a communications employee but I believe artistic directors pick the designer and stay involved in the design process regularly.

Dutch designers seem to have artistic autonomy when working with their clients. What is the client designer relationship like in Holland?

This question could as well be asked by someone from Belgium, our neighbor country. The answer is: the work and perseverance of independent designer-thinkers in the recent past are responsible for the relatively high design awareness on the client side. The profession has reached a certain status. And because of the earlier mentioned absence of hard commercial issues in culture land, design can be based on highly personal motives. Working for businesses however is a lot different.

Other factors:

- less authoritarian social structure, less based-on-hierarchical ways of thinking (compare: Germany, Belgium!)
- a well organized designer's guild (BNO)

The posters in our collection were made in the mid 90s through 2008. Has poster culture changed? If so, why? What is it like now?

The cultural poster, especially the theatre poster, is becoming an endangered species. Why? Digital/IT revolution: better use of customer relations management systems, internet, email. I guess.

Why don't we have posters like this in the States?

Why don't such posters work here?

Where would you put them? Posters are being seen by pedestrians and cyclists. You have spectacular billboards and neon signs.

(On the other hand: 300K Americans= how many local libraries? They could put up nice poster walls.)

Wout de Vringer

Wout de Vringer is one half of Faydherbe de Vringer, a Dutch graphic design studio located in the Hague for the last 20 years. The studio specializes in the design of house styles, annual reports, posters, and brochures. Wout is a member of AGI Alliance Graphique Internationale. His work has been exhibited internationally in exhibitions such as: Graphic Messages From GGG/DDD 1986-2006 Tokyo, Japan; Roadshow Dutch Graphic Design, AIGA NY; Dutch Posters 1960-1996, Traveling Exhibition, 1997-98.

1. De Haagse Salon for Pulchri Studio
45.5" x 34"
1990

2. Netherlands Dans Theatre
46.5" x 33.5"
1992-1993

3. DRD XXV
46.5" x 33.5"

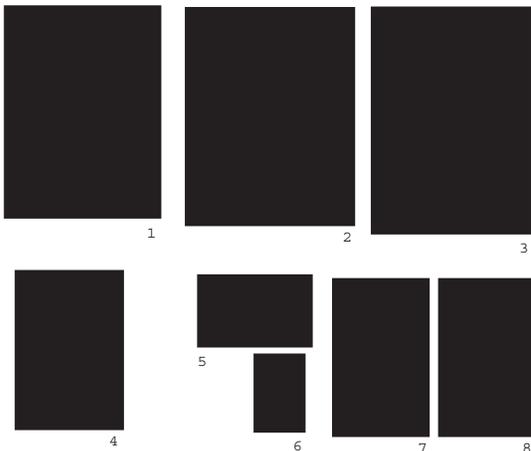
4. De Stad 4 for Wergroep De Stad
33" x 20.5"
1992

5. Image + Sound

6. Museon

7. De Haagse Zomer for Het Gebeuren
33.5" x 23.5"
1990

8. De Haagse Zomer
32" x 23"
1998



People attribute unconventional Dutch design to various factors, mainly its history, tradition and respect for the arts, government funding and subsidies, and its artificial geographic setting. What kind of cultural climate allows designers to make beautiful and challenging posters that function on the street?

Those factors you are mentioning are certainly important for creating an environment in which the arts and design can thrive in. But I think that designers in the U.S.A. have a misconception of how it is nowadays in Holland. I'm sure the climate for creating challenging work is much better in Holland than in most other countries, but things have changed here too. Since the beginning of the nineties, most of the state-owned companies like the Dutch Post (PTT) and The Dutch Railways (NS) privatized and that had a big impact. It suddenly became more corporate with all the consequences... More and more businessman were making the decisions on things like design.

What are the ideas and values underneath your work that make it unique?

We try to design "client-specific" work. Of course we have our influences (like work from the Pioneers of Modern Design, Contemporary Art etc.) that will reflect in the designs we make, but we believe in a dialogue with the client. Which means that we don't have a strict formula because every client is different and they all have different goals and viewpoints. Our designs have clarity to them, but we try to make them look exciting in the same time.

Are the majority of the cultural posters created by Dutch designers for Dutch clients? Who commissions these posters?

To my knowledge, yes. People who run the cultural institutions commission the posters.

Dutch designers seem to have artistic autonomy when working with their clients. What is the client designer relationship like in Holland?

It would be too simple to think there is a general relationship between a client and a designer. It is different every time. The only thing which is perhaps different in Holland, is that the clients are used to seeing challenging work and are therefore more willing to take a risk.

The posters in our collection were made in the mid 90s through 2008. Has poster culture changed? If so, why? What is it like now?

As I mentioned before, Poster culture in Holland has changed quite a bit. One reason why (at least to my opinion) the poster culture from the 80's/early 90's disappeared, was that there was less government funding for the arts and theatre. This and the fact that illegal poster billing became really common... this resulted in only seeing commercial posters and posters for big commercial events (like big concerts) in the streets on designated area's now days. In the eighties there were posters everywhere and not only for companies with a lot of money. So I think most designers in

the USA see it a little too rosy... They only see the best designs for the nicest cultural clients while the overall level is getting less, little by little.

6. Why don't we have posters like this in the States? Why don't such posters work here?

People don't get out of their cars in the USA! People have to see the poster from a great distance and very quickly, so you can't really work in layers or with "advanced typography." So the posters look mostly very simple and bland in the USA. (Sorry about that!) Furthermore: the general public is not used to seeing good design in their daily life. So it is more difficult to communicate...

In Holland almost anything is designed! (a little too much for my taste sometimes...)

Richard Niessen

Richard Niessen is a graphic designer who lives and work in Amsterdam. He has worked with OK (1996-1999) and Harmen Liemburg (1999-2002) as the Golden Masters. He has since opened a studio called Niessen & de Vries where the basis for his work are (typo)graphical building bricks taken from the (formal) content from which he has built layered, playful constructions. He also plays for the band Howtoplays.



1. Stedelijk Museum Poster
8.75" x 57.25"

2. Bezette Stad
19.5" x 27"

3. New Address 2
19.5" x 27"

4. Chaufont Poster, Constellation Font
47" x 33"
2003

5. New Address 1

6. Perdu Monthly Program Poster
20" x 13.75"

7. Perdu Monthly Program Poster
20" x 13.75"
2003

People attribute unconventional Dutch design to various factors, mainly its history, tradition and respect for the arts, government funding and subsidies, and its artificial geographic setting. What kind of cultural climate allows designers to make beautiful and challenging posters that function on the street?

First of all, I think there is a consciousness about graphic design... this is part of a tradition. Clients respect a certain level of autonomy. But more and more graphic design is becoming "democratized" and designers struggle with the fact that there is less and less direct contact with the client. There are many "managers" and "advisors" between themselves and the people who make the decisions. There's a lot of fear in this kind of organization. I think Dutch graphic design is still of some quality because of the designers that stay independent. Most of these designers feel secure within their social structure, and there is a lot of contact with other designers and easy access to designers from abroad. Holland is still a "design center." Of course because they are supported heavily by subsidies.

What is behind your work? What are the ideas and values underneath your work that make it unique?

There are many ideas behind the work I do. That's what makes it layered and complex. That is what I like. I want things to be multi-dimensional. There is never only one concept.

A basic idea is that I work like an architect. I create spaces or floor plans to order the information, and I build these spaces with bricks that spring from the subject. I think my work needs to be full of fantasy and challenging to the printer.

Are the majority of the cultural posters created by Dutch designers for Dutch clients? Who commissions these posters?

I think a lot of posters are commissioned by Dutch clients, yes. In my case the Perdu posters are monthly announcement posters. However, most of my posters I make as a personal spin-off of a commissioned project, or they are part of something I organize myself.

4. Dutch designers seem to have artistic autonomy when working with their clients. What is the client designer relationship like in Holland?

It's getting worse. I think Dutch designers are willing to earn almost nothing with the work they do, but they trade it for autonomy. Nowadays they even have to return their autonomy. Sometimes you are lucky, and of course there are subsidies. Designers from other countries seem so jealous about our situation, but I don't think they would if they knew the whole story.

There is a romantic view of Dutch design which is not correct. There is beautiful work being made, but it is the designers who are investing their time, money and energy there and not into creating an environment of dream-clients.

The posters in our collection were made in the mid 90s through 2008. Has poster culture changed? If so, why? What is it like now?

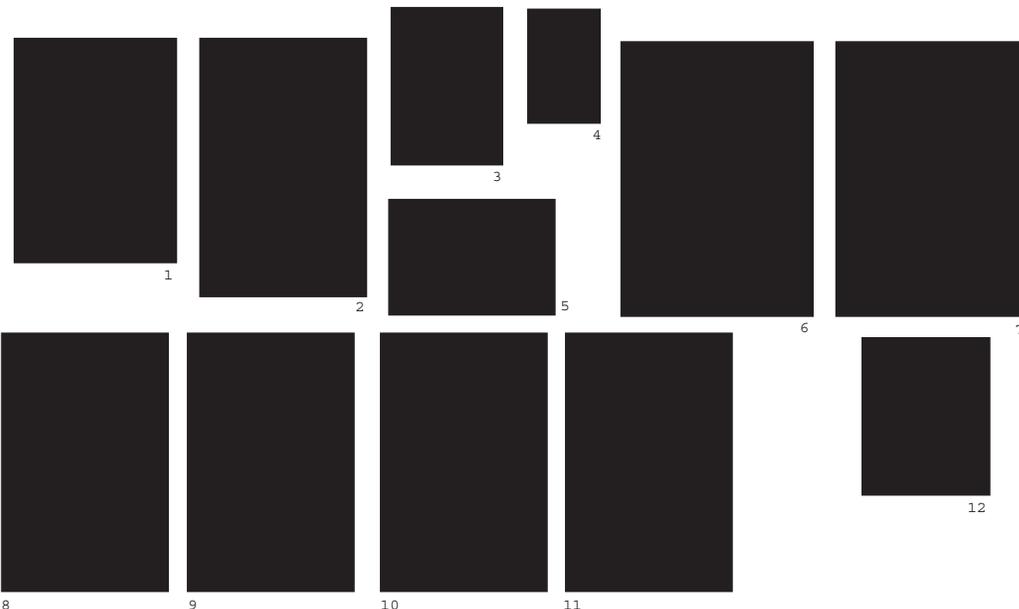
If you look on the streets of Amsterdam, the poster culture just faded away. Most of the clients turn to advertisement companies. I would like to work for a theatre-group, but they will never ask me. They have marketing tests and communication advisors and so on. There is no party for graphic designers anymore. But again, sometimes you are lucky. And sometimes you just make posters for yourself.

6. Why don't we have posters like this in the States? Why don't such posters work here?

I think because you underestimate yourself. Dutch design is a fairy-tale.

Willem Henri Lucas

Willem Henri Lucas studied at the Academy of Visual Arts in Arnhem in the Netherlands under guidance of Karel Martens and worked as an intern and apprentice for Max Kisman. He works for clients mostly based in the field of Culture and Art. From 1990 to 2002 he served as a professor and chair of the Utrecht School of the Arts' Graphic Design department. In 1998 he designed holiday postage stamps for the PTT (Dutch Post and Telecom company). In 2003 and 2004 he won a 'Best Book' award and a nomination from the Art Director's Club in the Netherlands. Henry is a professor at UCLA's D|MA.



1. **Strangers in Paradise**
23" x 33.5"
1994

2. **Pd2**
23.5" x 37"
1995

3. **Trouwen**
16.5" x 23"
1996

4. **Flux**
11" x 16.5"
1991

5. **Fotoruil**
24" x 17"
1989

6. **De 4E Salon**
28.5" x 40"
2001

7. **De 4E Salon**
28.5" x 40"
2002

8-11. **Decade (4)**
26.5" x 38"
2001

12. **Pork**
18" x 23"
1994

People attribute unconventional Dutch design to various factors, mainly its history, tradition and respect for the arts, government funding and subsidies, and its artificial geographic setting. What kind of cultural climate allows designers to make beautiful and challenging posters that function on the street?

Hmmm what was there first, the chicken or the egg? It's so many factors... let's start with:

A. The fact that the Netherlands is really dense and small (Los Angeles and it's vicinity is almost bigger) so an "old communication medium," such as the poster, is still viable and very much alive. Our audience, compared to Los Angeles, is on bikes and there are pedestrians, so people actually notice posters and are able to read them. So as a communication medium, it still works.

B. Neither design, or any other art form (be it modern dance, independent cinema, music etc.) needs to defend it's existence. Art is embedded in Dutch culture, and is considered important. Posters, next to their practical function, are considered "public art" and used by designers as such.

C. All artists are encouraged to express themselves, so as a designer (in the early days seen as the "almost invisible messenger"), you can actually be an author as well... meaning that your client (the one who provides the content) actually wants you as a designer to put a voice to it, to be an author in a way that is recognizable... especially with posters made for the cultural sector. In this kind of collaboration, between a theater group and a certain designer, there is usually not much money involved. But what is a given is that both parties use each other to the fullest, which leads to mutual trust and therefore artistic freedom.

What are the ideas and values underneath your work that make it unique?

Almost impossible to answer since I start at zero with every new client... I like to think that "research" and the approach, is what binds my work. What is the subject, what is it for... the answers to these questions differ with every new commission. Then there is of course a preference to simplicity, directness and being as clear as possible. I hate decoration... I want every element in my design to have a function.

As for the dutch designers, I think we have a legacy to live up to. We just build on what all our predecessors did before us. The goal is to look at tradition and figure out how to change it and explore borders.

Are the majority of the cultural posters created by Dutch designers for Dutch clients? Who commissions these posters?

Yes, most of them are... In the cultural world most artists, film makers, choreographers, theatre groups when getting subsidized already calculate in their budget an amount for design work and print work. They all have the opportunity to look for their own designers. The cultural world is small so almost everybody knows each other.

Dutch designers seem to have artistic autonomy when working with their clients. What is the client designer relationship like in Holland?

In general I think it is very good. Clients seem educated about design and art in general and willing to take risks. In many cases the designer is not only seen as the one who creates "visual form," but is brought in at the beginning of the thinking process and part of the editorial team. The work that is created is very much a result of a dialogue between client and designer.

The posters in our collection were made in the mid 90s through 2008. Has poster culture changed? If so, why? What is it like now?

I think recession has hit the Netherlands hard... there's just less money and we have a right-winged ministry now, that is responsible for big budget cuts in the cultural sector.

But it has not changed the streets much... the poster culture is still very much alive, just less designers get the opportunity to indulge in it. I went back to Holland in December of 2007, and the minute I entered Amsterdam most of the posters I saw addressed racial issues and intolerance... besides it's use in the cultural world the poster is still very much used as a political social medium.

Why don't we have posters like this in the States? Why don't such posters work here?

Good question that I don't know the answer to.

A. In L.A. (where I live now) the amount of pedestrians are small so you might want to spend money making a huge billboard. More importantly I have the feeling things are way more controlled here. In Amsterdam, at least once a year a poster will cause an uproar in the streets, as a result they are sometimes painted over or "censored" by the public... or discussed on national television. In a way it's a good test of what is tolerated by the public. The government does not feel the need to control this and feels "public opinion" should deal with these matters. But then the Dutch like to discuss and bitch about everything ha ha ha... But here's something that I realized after living here... I grew up in the Netherlands and our FIRST and most important LAW is: NO ONE CAN BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST whether it's because of religion, sexual preference, racial or any other issue. Only until now do I realize how such a simple given has a huge impact on a cultural identity. It creates real freedom of speech, of self expression, and it will test tolerance to the fullest... and I have to add that it did not prevent discrimination from happening... but at least it gives the human individual the strength and the courage to protest against it.

Harmen Liemburg

Born in Lisse, the Netherlands in 1966. Lives and works in Amsterdam.

After graduating from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in 1998, he started collaboration with graphic designer Richard Niessen, the "Golden Masters". As a team, they focused on the production of heavily detailed, colourful and multi-layered "graphical music". Hosting the JACK-events, they created a cross-disciplinary platform that connected young writers, musicians and designers.

Since 2002 Liemburg is working solo again, and puts emphasis on developing his authorship even more. Today, his self-initiated projects often involve collaboration with other (graphic) artists. This results in elaborate, delicately layered images that are silkscreen-printed by Liemburg himself.

1. Oceans of Joy
47" x 33"
2005

2. Let's Eat Whale!
47" x 34"
2007

3. Nippon 180
47" x 34" 2007

4. Offshore (A Tip Of The Liemburg...)
47" x 34"

5. Ultralight
47" x 34"
2009

6. Pays-Bas A-Z Concert and Party
47" x 33"

7. Ki ki ri ki Souvenir Poster
35" x 48"
2005

8. The Record Show
35" x 48"
2006

9. Speed
35" x 48"
2006

10. Sweet & Viscous
47" x 33"
2008

11. Dutch Flood
47" x 33"
2008

12. AtRandom #1
40" x 30"
2006



People attribute unconventional Dutch design to various factors, mainly its history, tradition and respect for the arts, government funding and subsidies, and its artificial geographic setting. What kind of cultural climate allows designers to make beautiful and challenging posters that function on the street?

The mythological interpretations of our heroic Dutch fight against the ever threatening elements and how this has shaped our prized liberal entrepreneurial society etc., I'll gladly leave up to the real storytellers...

What I do know is this: compared to the US, our schools in general are less expensive. Graphic designers in Holland who graduate from any art school, do not have the gigantic debts they literally have to work away like you guys do. Hence the pressure to do slave work at some advertising agency is less eminent. In addition to this, there is (still) public money available from art foundations as the Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture (known in the Netherlands as Fonds BKVB) to give starting designers a push. This money will not – as in Paradise – come falling from the sky, it takes an effort to get access to it. In general, clients are also interested in the work of young fresh designers. Some of them keep an eye on graduation shows, skimming off the cream of the crop each year. All in all, this creates an environment that stimulates new ideas and attitudes in the graphic arts, encourages young designers to stake their claim, and enables more seasoned designers to occasionally take a break and rejuvenate their work through travel and research.

What are the ideas and values underneath your work that make it unique?

In general, I value complexity, layering, textures, atmosphere and personal expression higher than the so called "clarity of message" that for a lot of people is the core of this applied art. It's impossible to disconnect my job from my personal life: graphic design, or art if you will, has become a way to look at the world and a means to express my love for the things and creatures that keep me occupied.

I have a strong awareness of my own modest position within the vast world of visual culture. I feel strongly connected to the work of designers from the past, but take an interest in that of contemporary peers as well. The borders between so called "high" and "low" art are of no importance to me. A piece of art at the Stedelijk Museum is equally important as a fruit crate I come across at the farmers market.

Are the majority of the cultural posters created by Dutch designers for Dutch clients? Who commissions these posters?

I do work for clients, but an important part of my work always has been self-initiated. Since I started to screen print my own work, this opened up the opportunity to create and publish work on my own terms exclusively. Until today, the prints usually serve a practical purpose: they announce an event of a public or personal character, so it still can be regarded as graphic design. Step by little step, I'm gaining more confidence to work outside this framework: making the prints will become a goal in and of itself.

Dutch designers seem to have artistic autonomy when working with their clients. What is the client designer relationship like in Holland?

The myths about the Dutch government (PTT) fostering the graphic arts is rapidly becoming something of a glorious past. These days, marketing arguments prevail over the artistic and educational goals. I think in general there is an exaggerated emphasis and concern on the visual rep-

resentation of brands, companies and organizations. When a new director takes a position, the first thing to go is the previous house style, and new designers are called in. Like dogs pee-marking their territory... Loyalty to a longer lasting client-designer relationship is becoming rare. I think the demands and "expertise" of communication and marketing experts is overvalued and is an obstacle to more adventurous work. Trying to please every potential client and avoid all risks leads to an overall and omnipresent mediocrity. A famous Dutch saying that illustrates the real heart of Holland goes something like this: "Do Normal, That's Crazy Enough As It Is."

The posters in our collection were made in the mid 90s through 2008. Has poster culture changed? If so, why? What is it like now?

In the urban environment, posters are still an important medium to advertise commercial and cultural messages, not only in the Netherlands, but also in other European countries. Nevertheless, real quality is hard to find. Clients in general try to avoid visually challenging messages, and all go for the same mediocre photography based solutions. So at least there's tons of posters on the streets, but most of them are total crap.

Why don't we have posters like this in the States? Why don't such posters work here?

Posters seem to literally lead an underground existence, that is to say, wherever there is a subway... I cannot explain why the poster disappeared from the streets of America. Maybe it's not such a big deal after all: you have a great heritage of public signage and automotive culture we Europeans lack.