Paula Scher
For over three decades Paula Scher has been at the forefront of graphic design. Scher studied at the Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia and began her graphic design career as a record cover art director at both Atlantic and CBS Records in the 1970s. In 1984 she co-founded Koppel & Scher, and in 1991 she joined Pentagram as a partner.

Areas of design: Identity design, packaging design, publication design, environmental graphics
Born 1948, Washington, D.C.
BFA Tyler School of Art & Doctor of Fine Arts Honoris Causa from the Corcoran College of Art and Design
Began her career as an art director in the 1970s and early 80s at CBS Records and Atlantic
1984 Co-founded Koppel & Scher
1991 Partner at Pentagram
1998 Art Directors Club Hall of Fame
1998-2000 President of AIGA’s NY chapter
2000 Chystler Award for Innovation in Design
2001 AIGA Medal (recognition of her achievement and contributions to the field of design)
2002 Make It Bigger published

Her teaching career includes over two decades at the School of Visual Arts, along with positions at the Cooper Union, Yale University and the Tyler School of Art.

Scher considers album-cover and book-jacket design to be the act of making small posters.

Jeane-Pierre Rampal cover, 1978. Composed of a variety of woodblock prints. The back cover was radical for its times because the typography is detailed, without an underlying or accompanying image.
(CBS Records)
The Best of Jazz, poster, 1979
A compilation of works by thirty jazz artists. Designed on Kraft paper from an industrial roll, with cut out names of artists from album covers that were already produced. At the time they looked radical (collage & type at tangents) (CBS)
Great Beginnings, 1984

A promotional small book that featured the 1st two paragraphs of famous novels designed in the period style in which they had been written. Successful in gaining new clients for their firm, although it was a gag and didn’t represent their actual style.

Koppel & Scher
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Koppel & Scher

ÖOLA, 1986
Swedish entrepreneurs approached Scher about designing an identity and some packaging for a chain of candy stores that they were planning to open in shopping malls on the East Coast. They already owned stores in Sweden and the UK. Their main attraction were large glass cylinders filled with brightly colored candy. Didn’t make the candy, but were selling an environment and an experience. She didn’t think of it as branding, but designing an environment, entertainment. Originally called Sweetwave, but Scher came up with ÖOLA. Chose the color palette and designed interior and exterior signage. (Best working environment, willing to take risks, designer as consultant, 2 decision makers.)
Swatch Watch USA, 1984
Design posters for a new youth-oriented product, being introduced in the US.
Spoof of Herbert Matter posters for Swiss travel (Schweiz).
Beautiful Faces / Dingbats, 1986
Promotion for Champion Papers for their Carnival paper line. Wanted to create some kind of tool, that was useful for designers. Collected Victorian, art noveau, art deco, streamline, etc. typefaces. Scher selected 20 odd fonts and laid their alphabets out on a grid on a 11-by-17 inch photocopier (popular tool of the 80s). The typefaces were then printed on Champion Carnival papers, inserted into a portfolio and distributed to 40,000 graphic designers. It became the most requested promotional piece in Champion’s history. It gave the design community access to a reproducible type portfolio for free and had the greatest individual impact Scher would make on the design style of the times.
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Ambassador Arts, c.1988
Ambassador Arts, a silkscreen printing company, adopted the “Big A” as its identity and suggested the creation of an entire alphabet. Scher arranged a cross-promotion with Champion papers and selected 12 designers to produce the alphabet. Scher specified the size of the poster, a red-and-black color pallette, and assigned the letters. Scher did the g and i.
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Posters

The Chrysler Building composed of a list of the entire membership of the AIGA NY Chapter, 1989

For Scher’s show in Osaka, Japan, 1999

For Scher’s show. She smoked two and half packs of Parliaments at the time.
More Posters

Design Renaissance Conference in Glasgow, Scotland, 1993
Blah Blah Blah: When asked by Worth Magazine to make a visual comment on the future of technology, this is Scher’s response.
A poster advocating literacy, designed for the Denver Chapter of the AIGA, 1997
Poster honoring the centenary of Toulouse-Lautrec’s death, 2001.
Painting

AIGA, 1990
Did not use an expenses, painted instead of typsetting to do so. Cover design for Graphic Design USA II.

Map, 1999
The Public Theater (posters), 1994
Guess Who & Jenifer Lewis’s one-woman show
The Public Theater fused high and low into a wholly new symbology for cultural institutions.
CITI, 1998
Traveler’s Group and Citicorp merged. Traveler’s had a red umbrella for a logo and Citigroup’s logo had italic type with a dingbat at the end of it called “the compass rose”. Another feature was a blue band. Scher designed their new logo.
Poster for the 1997 season of Ballet tech
After designing for the Public Theater, Scher designed for Ballet Tech.
Ballet Tech poster, 1999 & 2000
Metropolis
Oversized, the editors were anxious to reduce the size, giving Scher the opportunity to redesign the magazine.
NJPAC, 2000
The New Jersey Performing Arts Center had received funding to convert an old school building (1940’s) into a high school for the performing arts. The building was depressing, and there wasn’t a large budget for anything other than painting. Scher used the nooks, crannies, and turrets of the castle-like structure to display the typography. Her work re-imagined the urban landscape as a dynamic environment of dimensional graphic design.
“...design isn’t quite that simple. You don’t just make something, have people go ‘Ooh!’ and you’re done. What generally happens is that the reason you have to make something at all comes from some very complicated problem or issue that involves lots and lots of people that are afraid and jealous and suspicious, so before you even get to make the thing you have to really suss out the lay of the land so you can get everybody over all the stuff that’s upsetting them, so they can be prepared to get excited about it.”
References

Make It Bigger
Paula Scherr
2002

Inspirability
Pash
2005

AIGA Website
Gallery: Paula Scher
2006

Pentagram Website
Partners: Paula Scher
2006