

KAREL MARTENS

ABSTRACT

Dutch typographic designer Karel Martens is one of the most influential and enduring designers alive in the Netherlands today. His body of work spans over 50 years and manages to maintain a freshness and timeless appeal. In 1996 he was awarded the Dr. H.A. Heineken Award—the top graphic design award in Holland. He is the founder of the Werkplaats Typografie, a post-graduate graphic design school in Arnhem, NL, as well as a lecturer at the Yale School of Graphic Design, and the Jan Van Eyck Academy in Maastricht, NL. Karel Martens work is often regarded as defining “dutch design” and many of the aesthetic and conceptual characteristics he employs have been widely appropriated by the design community in NL and abroad.

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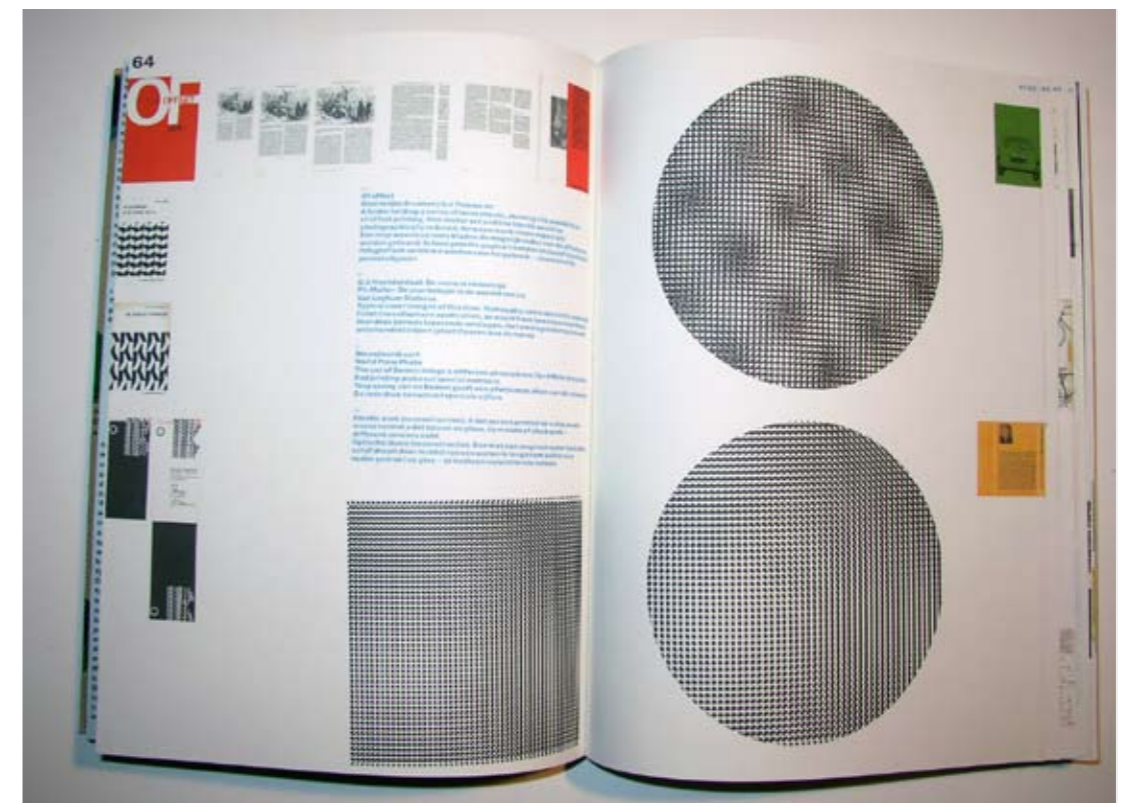
BACKGROUND

- 1939 Born
- 1970s Works for Kluwer conglomerate and designs large series of book covers
- 1977 Begins teaching in Arnhem - contributes to “Arnhem Typography”
- 1990 Takes over design of Oase Architectural Journal
- 1994 Joins Jan Van Eyck Academie in Maastricht
- 1996 Wins Dr. A.H. Heineken Prize for Art, publishes Printed Matter
- 1997 Founds Werkplaats Typografie with Armand Mevis
- 2004 Publishes Counterprint

KAREL MARTENS DESCRIPTION

Karel Martens earliest works were his book covers for an Arnhem based publishing house. They exhibit simple, clean swiss typography, an emphasis on legibility, and the use of repeated simple geometric shapes.

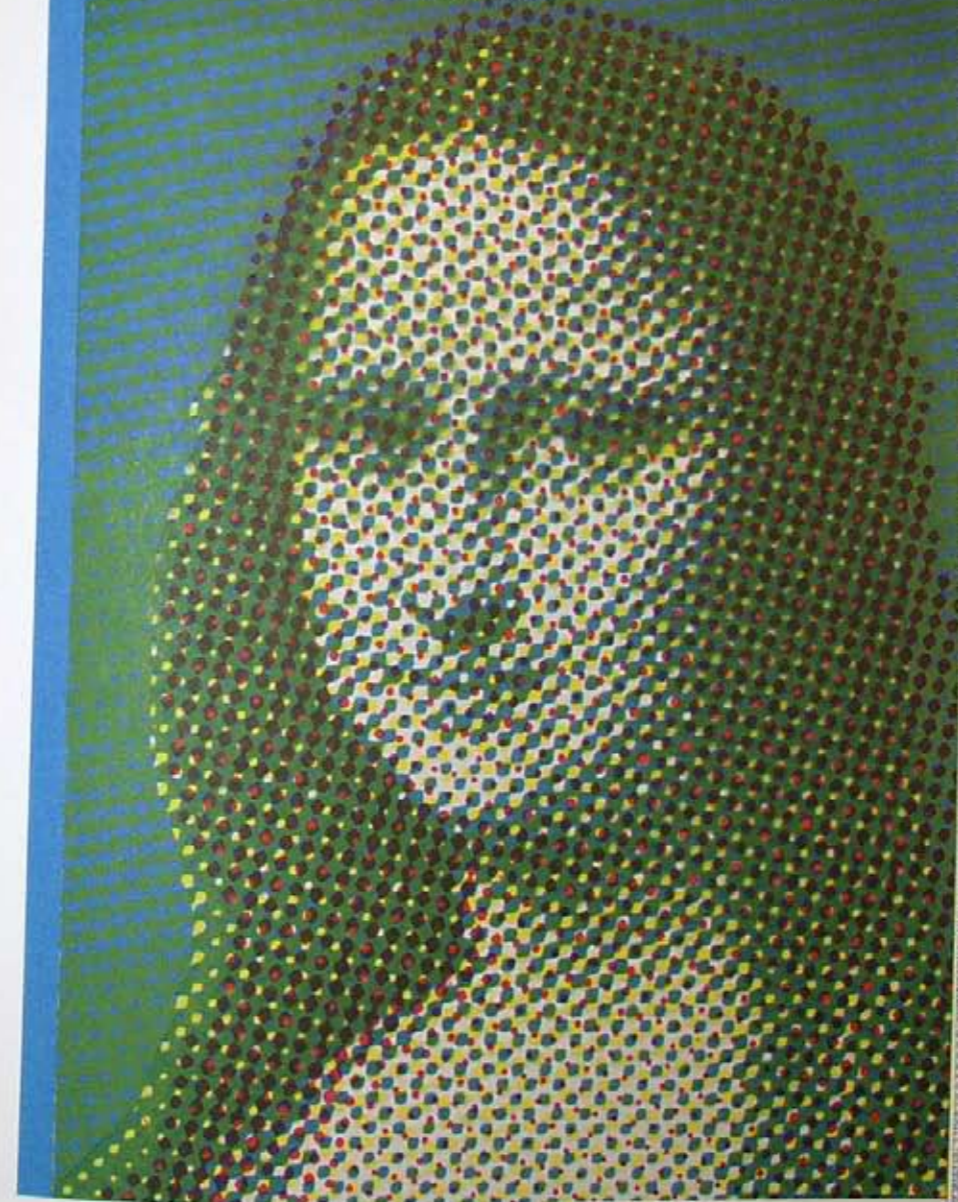
His later covers begin to experiment with imagery. However this is kept very minimal and simple.



Hoe langer hoe minder vormt het gezin het houvast voor ons gevoelsleven. Moderne emotionaliteit is een openbare aangelegenheid geworden. Vreemd genoeg is het juist de gezinstherapie die dit proces bezegelt. Voor haar is het gezin een inwisselbaar systeem. Emotionele problemen verklaart zij uit het systeemkarakter en niet uit de gezinsbanden zelf. In het themadeel van deze P&M informeren drie artikelen over de gezinsbehandeling. De bestanddelen zijn interviews met vooraanstaande nederlandse gezinstherapeuten, de theoretiese fundamenteen van de gezinstherapie en een alternatief hulpverleningsprojekt. Verder in deze P&M een mannelijke bijdrage aan het pornodebat. Pornografie stelt de mannelijke seksualiteit ter diskussie en toont haar als een vat vol ambivalenties waarin de man heen en weer geslingerd wordt tussen de vrouw als moeder en als lustbron. Voorts het verslag van een theoreties en empiries onderzoek naar bondgenootschap tussen vrouwen. Groepen, samengesteld uit lichamelijk, cultureel en seksueel verschillende

Walter Benjamin Het kunstwerk in het tijdperk van zijn technische reproduceerbaarheid

Waarin opgenomen Kleine geschiedenis van de fotografie en Eduard Fuchs, verzamelaar en historicus, Sunschrift 97



KAREL MARTENS DESCRIPTION

One of Karel Martens most enduring trend setting projects was his design for a series of dutch phone cards.

The idea is simply the joy of seeing what happens with colors when they overlap in typography. The numbering system is derived from the dutch national anthem, where each word is coded into a series of numbers.





B E E L D E N



(of what they are, they print)

	G	B	R	Z
VV2	2	2	2	2
100	5	5	5	5
N.V.	7	7	7	7
BT	0	0	0	0
100	6	6	6	6
500	8	8	8	8
VW	9	9	9	9
de	0	0	0	0
T.1	6	6	6	6
PK	1	1	1	1
VAD	0	0	0	0
du	0	0	0	0

Standard telephone cards (Standard telefoonkaarten) PTT Telecom/PTT Kunst & vormgeving. The first scheme for the series of cards was an array of numbers printed in colour, with increase in density corresponding to greater value. Numbers were not random, but determined by a computer print. These same-size numbers were read by a 'zooming-out' to reveal more numbers and greater value. The design was developed, and this was the design that was implemented in recyclable plastic, with the gold chip proudly displayed on the industrial serial number. At right: initial typewriter design.

De eerste opzet voor de kaarten was een getalraster, met een toenemende cijferdichtheid, gemiddeld naar de verschillen in waarde. De getallen werden niet willekeurig, maar volgens een letter-cijfer-code bepaald naar de computerprint. Deze zelfde grootte cijfers werden gelezen door een 'uitzoemen' om meer cijfers en hogere waarden zichtbaar te maken. Toespast in het ontwerp is het materiaal is afbreekbaar kunststof - een gouden chip is prominent getoond, evenals het industriële serienummer. Het eerste idee schets, gemaakt met de schrijfmachine.



05667890580850953768893710015908
 68548274315440890913744126400170
 30956600089092389523256095540070
 00567890808565427910074853585669
 00850380075553278309463328799500
 04772653634079459469009546673219
 23557890900783560567899081409901
 703587858169787694782073334999
 102866808450987692167600907283
 024755432009928546244123469967890
 242569800726425435563456790820
 84199441468891569896843078697863

1^G

5^G

10^G

25^G

50^G

2 1/2^G

7 1/2^G

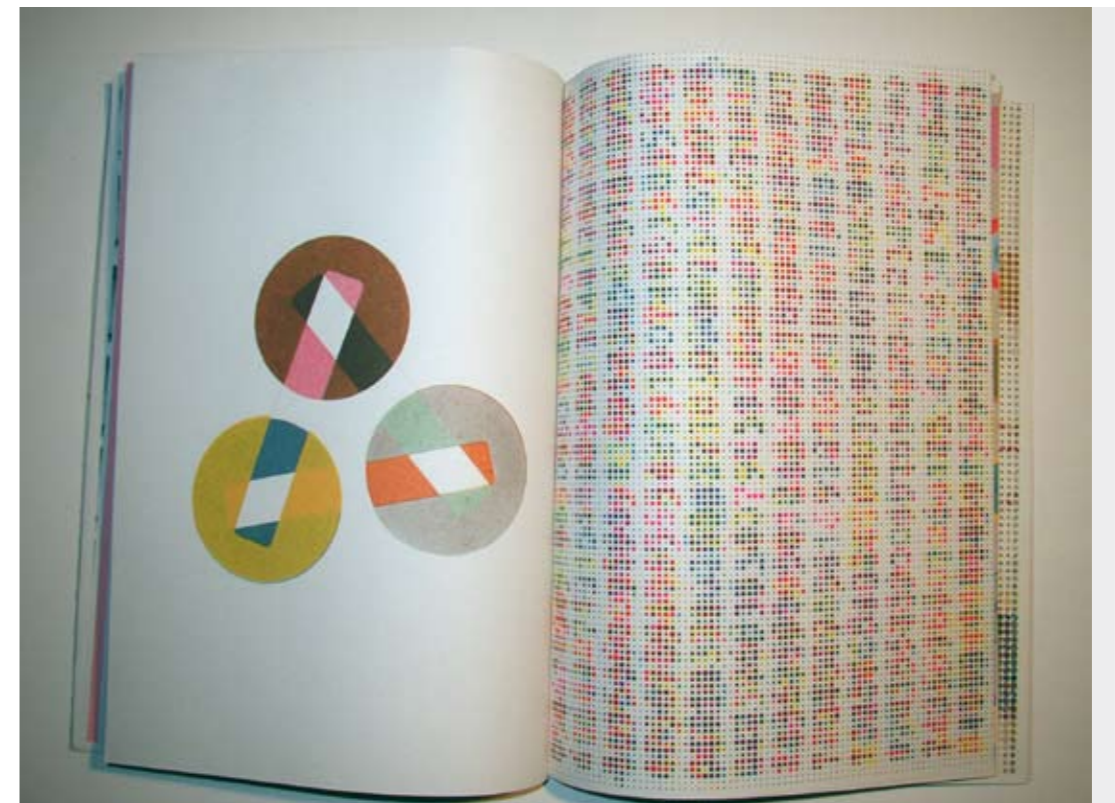
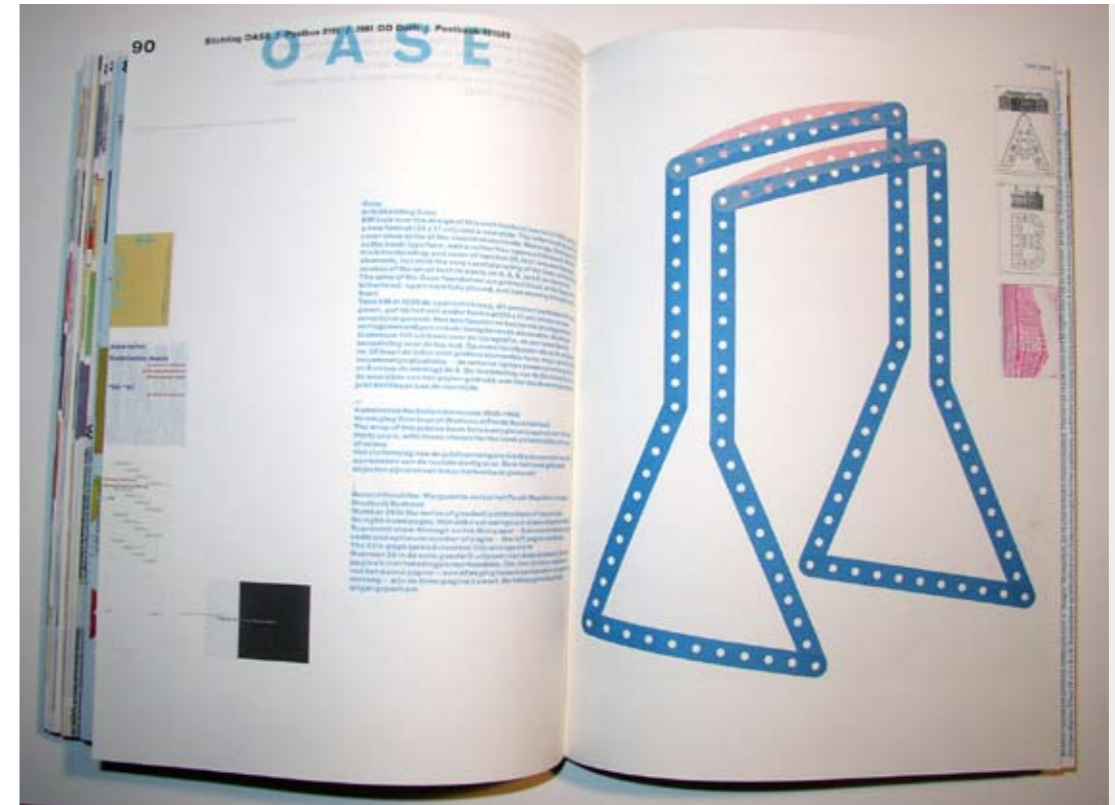
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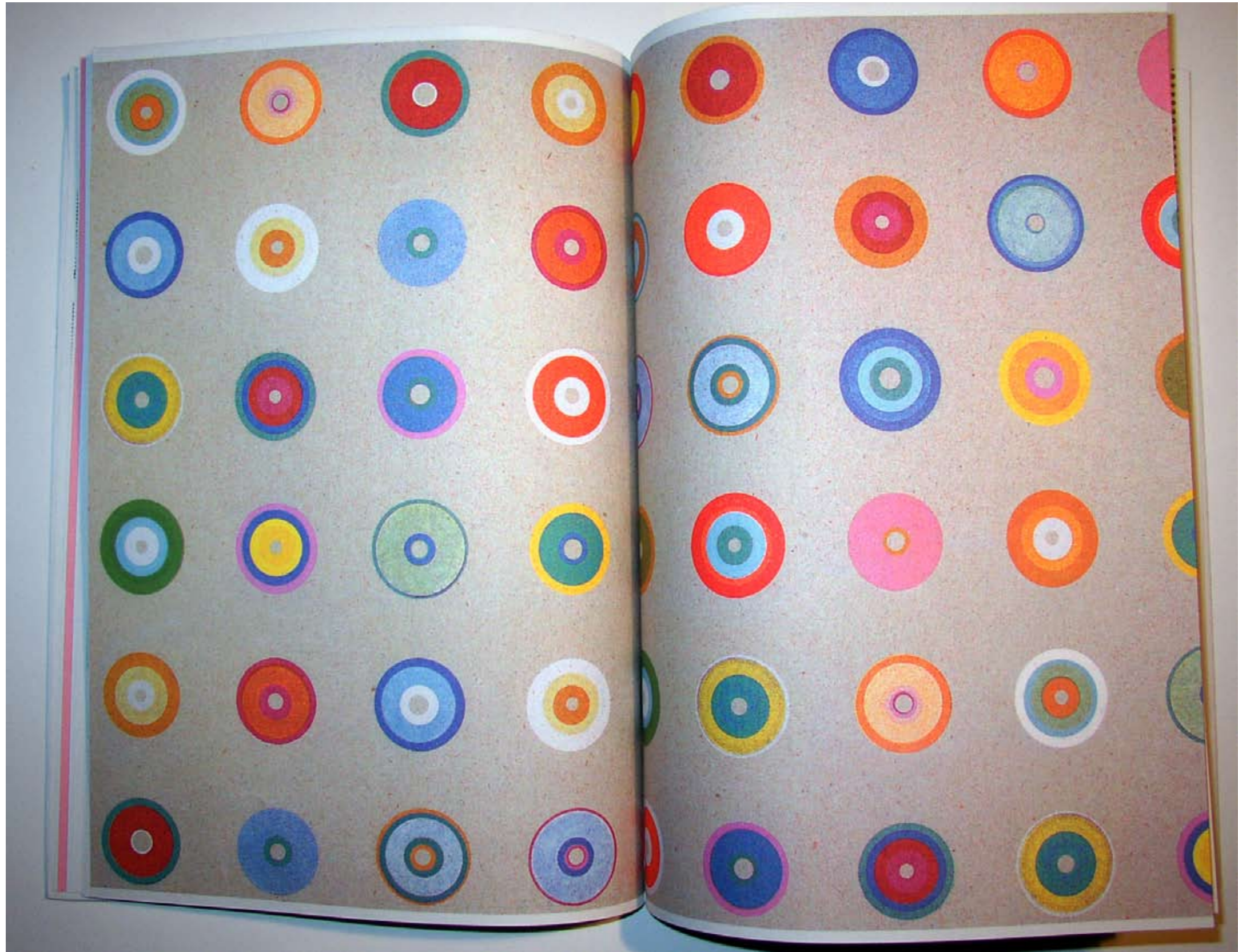
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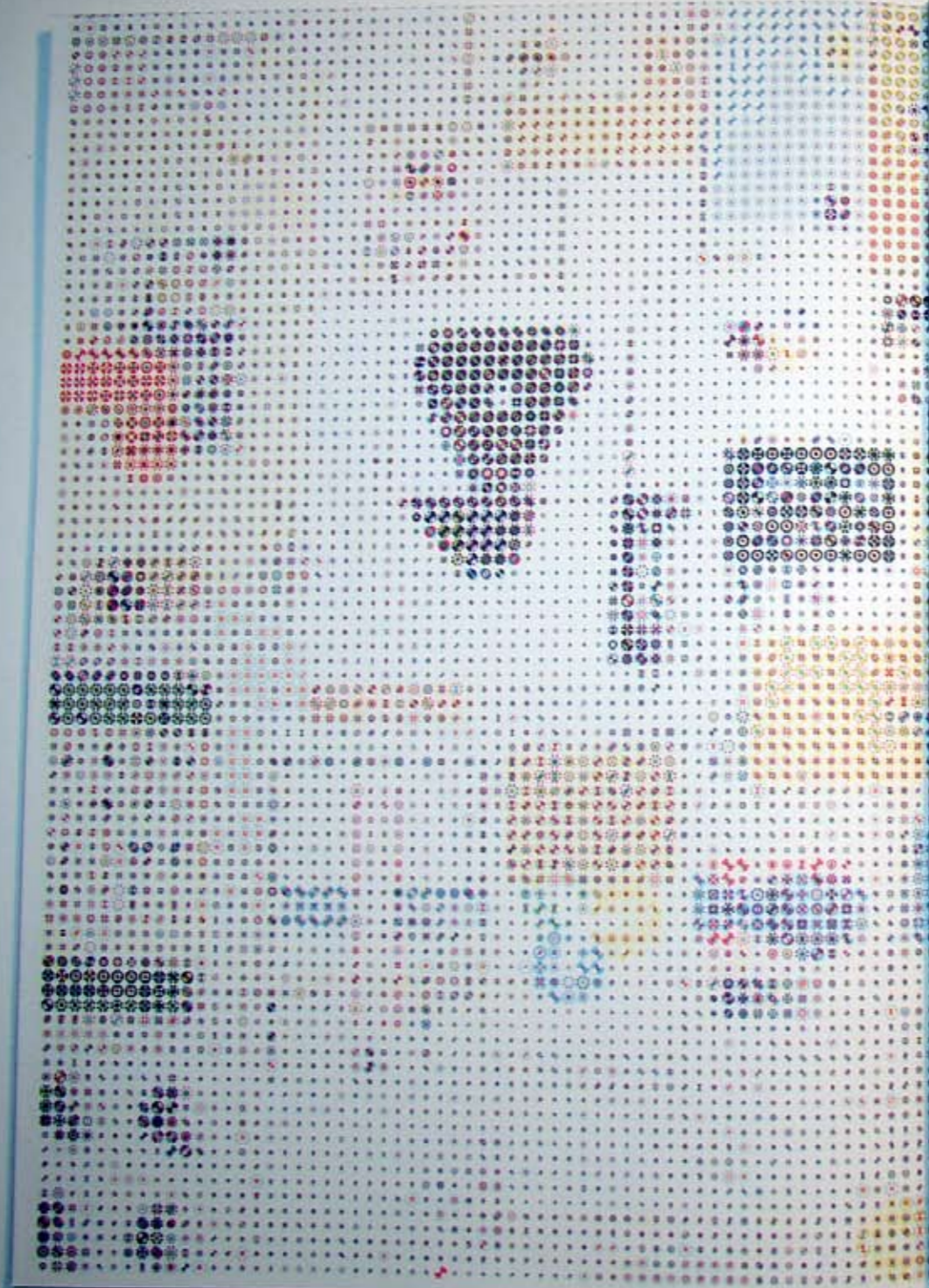
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In 1990 KM took over the design of the architectural journal: Oase. The magazine's editor intended for KM to give the design as a project to students, but instead Martens used it as formal playground for experimentation with his own work.

This is where he first began his “mono-print” works inspired by “nul group” aesthetics.







KAREL MARTENS ANALYSIS

Karel Martens work is not especially relevant to motion typography. Play with color and the results of overlapping colored shapes may suggest some sort of dimensionality or motion, but still remain quite static.

The extreme formalism and emphasis on legibility does not display the narrative qualities necessary in time based media.

The only parallels could be to the 60s work of Saul Bas — but this connection is merely aesthetic. (i.e. The high contrast simple geometric shapes and swiss modernist typography.)

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CONCLUSIONS

Qualities:

- unification of art & design
- works are not concept driven, with “one liners.” meaning derived from a “subtler infusion”
- focus on text & its meaning ‘body forth’
- typography is committed, non-dogmatic, focus on detail

Criticism:

- stranglehold on dutch design : tons of contemporary dutch work could easily be mistaken for his work from the 60s’. (lack of evolution)
- inability or refusal to work with images / photography
- formal study lacks meaning, message, & concept. Remains in the realm of superficiality & beauty.

KAREL MARTENS REFERENCES

Printed Matter

Karel Martens
1996

Counterprint

Karel Martens
2004

In Alphabetical Order

Paul Elliman
2002