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 Maastrict, 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.
KAREL MARTENS
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 bezegeelt. Voor haar is het gezin een inwisselbaar systeem. Emotionele problemen verklaart zij uit het systeem-karakter en niet uit de gezinsbanden zelf.

In het themadeel van deze P&O informeren drie artikelen over de gezinsbehandeling. De bestanddelen zijn interviews met vooraanstaande Nederlandse gezinstherapeuten, de theoretische fundamenten van de gezinstherapie en een alternatief hulpverleningsproject. Verder in deze P&O 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 theorieën en empiries onderzoek naar bondgenootschap tussen vrouwen. Groepen, samengesteld uit lichamelijk, kultureel en seksueel verschillende
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.
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DESCRIPTION

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 “monoprint” 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.
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REFERENCES

Printed Matter
Karel Martens
1996

Counterprint
Karel Martens
2004

In Alphabetical Order
Paul Elliman
2002