

## Lorraine Wild

Insightful, gifted, and ever mindful of the professional conscience, Lorraine Wild has changed both the face and voice of graphic design in the United States. Her accomplishments are unequivocal. From the inception of her career, she has brought her considerable intellect and creativity equally to graphic design practice, education, and history. Fluently traversing the realms of design and writing, of personal sensibility and social circumstance, Lorraine recognizes design both as a body of knowledge and a pursuit of knowledge. At heart, she is a negotiator. In her studio practice, she demonstrates the power of understatement as an artful means of binding form and content; in her teaching and writing, she wields the eloquence of polemic to engage her colleagues and students in an ongoing examination of their collective project.

Canadian-born, but a life-long American resident, Lorraine's career was indelibly stamped by her years at Cranbrook Academy of Art in the influential design program run by Katherine and Michael McCoy. After receiving her BFA from Cranbrook in 1975, she worked for Vignelli Associates in New York from 1977 to 1978. During this time, she began her research on the history of American graphic design, which led to her graduate studies at Yale University and a lifelong pursuit of the latent possibilities in design history. While at Yale she designed *Perspecta 19*, Yale's architectural journal and, in the ensuing years, the *Chamber Works* and *Theatrum Mundi* portfolios for architect Daniel Libeskind (1985), and architect John Hejduk's book *Mask of Medusa* (1985)—projects that launched her reputation for thoughtful and distinctively designed books on architecture, art and design.

It was not long after her graduation from Yale in 1982, however, that Lorraine would also demonstrate the power of her own prose and her commitment to publishing. During her tenure at the University of Houston's architecture school, she wrote the highly influential essay "More than a few questions about graphic design education." First published in *The Design Journal* in 1983, Lorraine's provocative analysis served as the impetus for recharacterizing graphic design education in the United States. Her critique considered the shape of what might constitute a serious specialized program of graphic design study. In particular, she described two distinguishing values: First, that of making form meaningful and, second, the importance of "students seeing themselves within the historical continuum of visual and verbal communicators."

The latter—the sense of continuum—was born out in Lorraine's seminal contribution to the exhibition catalogue *Graphic Design in America* (Walker Art Center, 1989). Titled "European Modernism and American Graphic Design Between the Wars," her groundbreaking essay established a new consciousness of graphic design's evolution in the United States, articulating the convergence of European Modernism with American commercialism during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Four years later, in "Graphic Design: Lost and Found," which appeared in *The Edge of the Millennium* (Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, 1993), Lorraine turned her focus to the state of contemporary design, then and now, caught between modernism and postmodernism. Arguing for a more relevant role for designers, she observed, "The pressure on the young designer is not to become a star, a master or mistress of the universal, but to become a participant in the communication process, a co-conspirator, a co-author, maybe even an author/designer." This is a role she has effectively modeled in her practice and her teaching.

When Lorraine became director of the Graphic Design California Institute of the Arts in 1985, she saw an opportunity for the program to become a laboratory for the model of education she first explored in "More than a few questions." Her experiment transformed the ad hoc nature of much of graphic design education at the time into a distinct plan for a structured program specific to teaching the knowledge and skills required by graphic designers to function at the highest levels. Lorraine positioned design as part of an evolving rather than static professional culture that was inextricable from culture (and cultures) at large. Her model of education placed a premium on encouraging work that was highly imaginative and open to unanticipated outcomes, a legacy from the philosophy of Cranbrook. Lorraine stepped down as program director in 1985 and has continued to serve on the Cal Arts faculty, also serving as project tutor, Jan van Eyck Akademie, Maastricht, The Netherlands from 1991 to 1998.

At the same time she was transforming the curriculum at Cal Arts, Lorraine was becoming increasingly visible as a designer. During these years, she forged a collaborative design ethos of respectful translation, marked by a sensitivity to the vision of others that is especially apparent in her contributions to the field of book design. She also continued to hone a design philosophy dedicated to restoring the experimentation, innovative vision, criticality and awareness of context by which modernism was first defined.

In 1991, Lorraine became one of the founders of the design office ReVerb, which received the Chrysler Award for Innovation in Design in 1995. In 1996, she left ReVerb to establish Lorraine Wild Design, which became known as Green Dragon Office in 2004, to focus on collaborations with architects, artists, curators and publishers in this country and abroad. In 1999, as a side project, she partnered with Roman Alonso and

Lisa Eisner to found Greybull Press, an imprint specializing in the publication of photographic archives and collections.

Lorraine's exceptional contributions to graphic design have been celebrated in exhibitions, honored by awards and by the formal and informal testimonies of her colleagues, students and professional critics. In 1998, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art exhibited "Lorraine Wild: Selections from the Permanent Collection," a display of work acquired as part of their collection of significant design produced in California. In 2001, Lorraine was one of three finalists for the Communication Award of the National Design Awards, sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum. Her work was also included in the Cooper-Hewitt's 2003 National Design Triennial.

In 2001, Lorraine was awarded a Gold Medal by the New York Art Director's Club for the design of *Height of Fashion*, one of numerous publications for which she has been recognized. She has received numerous awards from such prestigious organizations as the American Center for Design, the American Institute of Architects and the American Association of University Publishers. Lorraine's award-winning books have been repeatedly included in AIGA's highly selective "50 Books/50 Covers" competition. Her thoroughly informed and deeply sympathetic understanding of the nature of art and design has brought her commissions for monographs on artists and architects as far-ranging as Mike Kelley and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, as well as books and exhibition catalogues for institutions such as Whitney Museum of American Art, Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, The Getty Museum, UCLA's Hammer Museum, and the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.

Always alert to the vagaries of culture that inform how design operates and how it is understood, Lorraine's work continues to generate new, considered models of practice, of thinking, and of design itself. In furthering design as an intellectual and creative discipline, she does not flinch from raising questions that challenge the evolving discipline of graphic design. Witty, anecdotal, and always profoundly insightful, she has raised the quality of debate within the profession. Increasingly influential, she has now found a forum to share her ideas with a vast audience as a regular contributor to the online journal "Design Observer."

In all of her work, Lorraine continues to explore and extend the parameters of practice to encompass a wider notion of literacy, be it in politics, in art, in architecture, or in the significance of the ephemera of daily life. She is as ecumenical in her appetites as she is generous in her practice and in her friendships. Her contributions as an educator, practitioner, historian and writer, have been, and are, vital to the growth of this discipline and will be felt through the continuum of generations.

Louise Sandhaus and Susan Yelavich