

MY BEST WORK

MICHAEL BIERUT

The last image I show at almost every lecture I give is a poster I did in 1992: a call for entries for the American Center for Design 100 Show. I was the chair of the judges panel that year.

I remember I was very confused at the time about the direction that graphic design was taking, and about the direction my own work was taking. It just seemed to me that there were so many “style wars” raging that it was difficult to think clearly.

As chair, it was my responsibility to design the poster. All my anxiety came to a head over this project. I thought about it for weeks and everything I could think of seemed horrible. I was unable to produce anything. The fact that the brief was wide open made my creative block all the more embarrassing.

The ACD kept asking about the (nonexistent) design. Finally, they asked me to provide a statement to be printed on the back of the poster. I sent them a stream of consciousness rant that came straight out of my state of mind.

They suggested in turn that the statement be printed on the front of the poster—an all type solution. But picking the typeface was the problem. I wanted to figure out a way to make it not about style at all—in fact, to make it not about design at all.

Finally, I hit on the idea of having my daughter Elizabeth, who was then 4-and-a-half years old, create the poster. Elizabeth could not read yet, but she did know her alphabet. I dictated the text to her letter by letter. The result is what you see.

The American Center for Design no longer exists. My daughter Elizabeth, however, is very much with us: She graduates this year with honors from Swarthmore College. She has no memory whatsoever of helping me with my favorite poster. —MICHAEL BIERUT

Michael Bierut is a partner in the New York City office of the international design consultancy Pentagram. He's a senior critic at the Yale School of Art, has served as president of the AIGA, and was the winner of the AIGA's medal in 2006. A founder and editor of DesignObserver.com, he's the author of the collection “79 Short Essays on Design.”

THE PROJECT

American Center for Design
100 Show Poster

THE TEAM

Michael Bierut, partner at
Pentagram New York City
(www.pentagram.com);
with lettering by daughter
Elizabeth Bierut

