

TRIPLE DUTCH

HOLLAND'S NEW GRAPHIC DESIGN AVANT-GARDE—THREE OF THE NEW DUTCH MASTERS

The entire Dutch landscape is "designed:" oceans are held at bay by dikes, houses are rooted in landfill. Thus design—the human planning and manipulation that permits a nation to exist in a flatland below sea level—is a historical, socio-economic, and geographical fact in the Netherlands.

Dutch art and design became influential after the first world war with the advent of two powerful forces: the analytical, theoretical reductivism of the De Stijl group (of which Piet Mondrian was the most prominent member), and the groundbreaking journal of the Amsterdam-based Architectura Et Amicitia group, *Wendingen*, published from 1918 to 1931, which explored radical new concepts in architecture, design and in particular typography. Since then, internationally influential Dutch graphic design has proliferated, and during the '70s and '80s, Holland became a hub of the avant-garde.

The modern Dutch approach to graphic design is informal, liberal, expressive and generous to its subjects. The police force logo isn't about guns and

batons but about quality of life. Guilder bank notes (supplanted in January 2002 by the French-designed Euro) featured lighthouses, sunflowers and abstract geometrical patterns instead of heads of state or esoteric symbols of power. Although any phone book or municipal logo is "designed," we actually know and care about who designed the Amsterdam phone book (Martin Majoor). The three studios presented here—178 Aardige Ontwerpers, Martijn Engelbregt, and Hotel—constitute a cross-section of current Dutch graphic design, the product of working from scratch instead of reacting to other designers' work or popular trends. More akin to fine art conceptualizing than ad agency brainstorming, each utilizes irony and humor as much as they do images and words. Best of all, it's impossible to distinguish their professional from their personal projects because one flows naturally from the other. This is the forefront of Dutch design at the beginning of the 21st century.

SHONQUIS MORENO

178 AARDIGE ONTWERPERS

The five designers that make up 178 Aardige Ontwerpers (178 Affable Designers) start their design processes anywhere but on the computer: they take holiday snaps, beer coaster doodles, dirt scanned directly on a flatbed, and create work that is both serious and ironic, critical and self-mocking. 178 plays on the boundaries between good and bad design to create tailor-made solutions, not trendy reactions. 178 have exported a member, to establish a sister studio, For, in New York City.

What's unique about your design?

We work in a chaotic way but in a positive sense. Chaos often leads to creativity and beautiful coincidences. The tools we work with are digital as well as analog. Sometimes we use an old typewriter to do the typography, for instance, but in the end it always finds its way into the computer. We want to show authenticity and "handwriting" in a digital age. It's nice to see a bit of the struggle of the design process in the end result.

What is the concept behind your studio's house style?

The basis is pieces of text. Everyone has his own custom title that broadens the meaning of graphic designer. It also contains images of each of our haircuts, because a haircut is a unique piece of personal "house style." It can tell a lot about a person... or not. It looks rough but clear at the same time. And that is what we are.

What's unique about Dutch design?

The whole Dutch landscape is designed like some kind of artwork. Culture and nature are very much intertwined in one big collage. We are almost naturally used to the artificiality of things. Graphic design is artificial by definition so designing is our second nature. Making things better isn't good enough!

178's work for theater group Warner + Consorten, Carhartt Europe, hip-hop musician Mocky and Utrecht's School of Fine Arts is linked from their website at www.178aardigeontwerpers.nl

