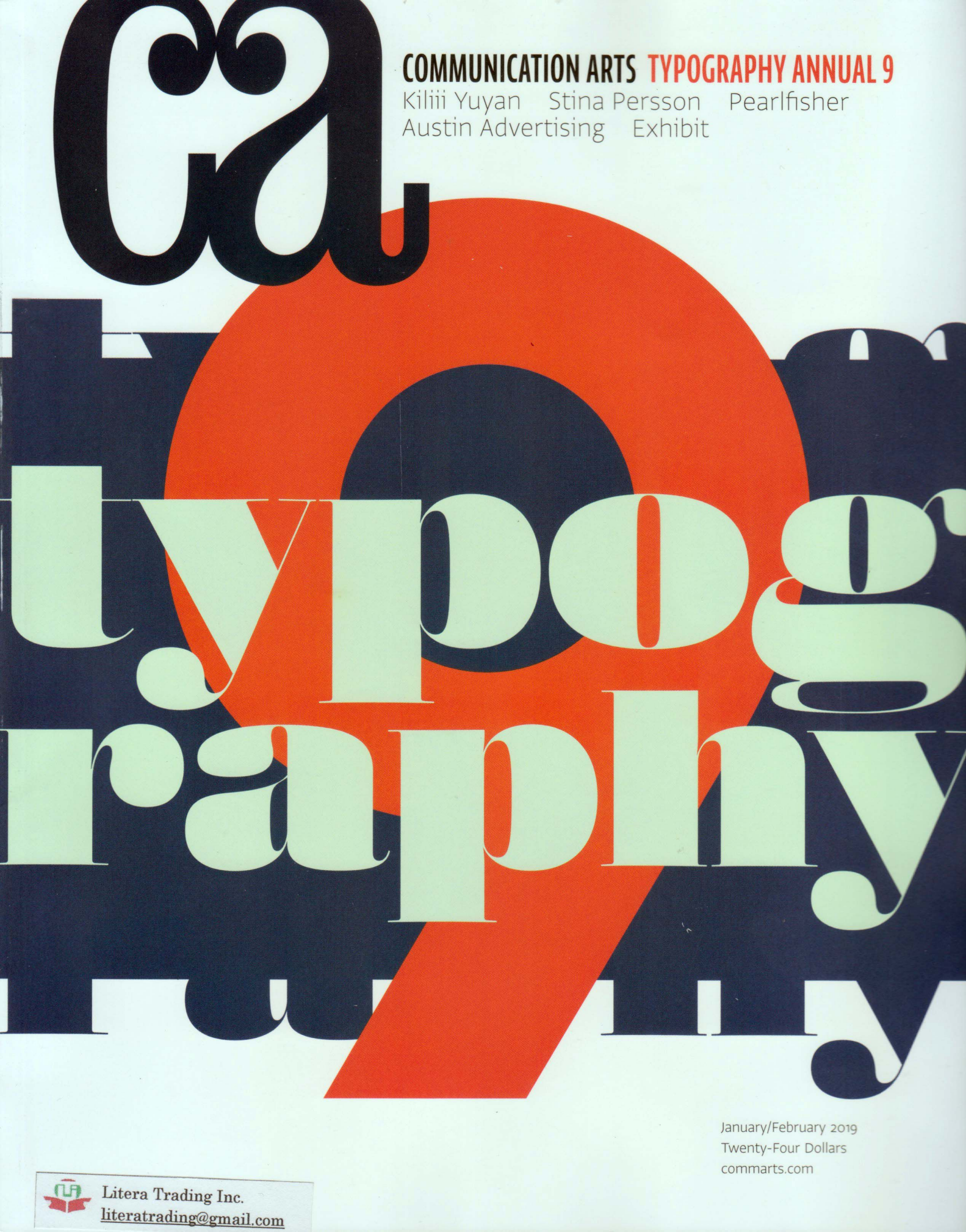


COMMUNICATION ARTS **TYPOGRAPHY ANNUAL 9**

Kiliii Yuyan Stina Persson Pearlfisher
Austin Advertising Exhibit



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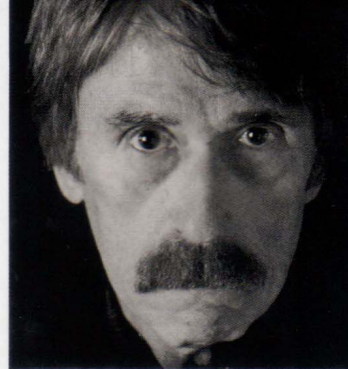
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The Truth Is Out There. Kind Of.

"Truth isn't truth" —Rudy Giuliani

How many times have we heard it. The genesis of a great idea begins with an authentic truth, an insight so perfect, so firmly rooted in who and what we are as a species, it is undeniable and inarguable. Some of the greatest advertising ever created has emerged as a result of an ability to ferret out that truth, hitch a saddle to it and ride it to glory.

Recently, I asked creatives on Facebook to tell me what agencies, brands and campaigns have most successfully managed to pull this off. There were many. Here's what some of them had to say.

"In 1977, Nike and John Brown & Partners, a little-known agency in Seattle, set the course for a brand behavior that demonstrated that what you believe in and how you say it have to ring true," wrote John Doyle. "A print ad titled *There Is No Finish Line* aligned itself with the human spirit—the euphoric nature of running." Long before "Just Do It," long before Wieden+Kennedy, this one simple ad spoke to a truth that would one day live on as "Just Do It." It does to this day.

The authentic truth. It's absolute. It's unshakeable. Its power to propel us as creatives mighty beyond measure. But there is another truth.

More than a few pointed to Goodby Silverstein & Partners and its brilliant *Got Milk?* campaign. "When the California Milk Processor Board finally accepted that selling milk on its health benefits wasn't nearly as compelling as its perception as a natural partner for foods like cookies, cake and whatever else, that single human truth sold a lot of milk," wrote Guy Bommarito.

And speaking of truth, few campaigns have managed to uncover a more powerful human insight as Truth. The collective genius of Crispin Porter + Bogusky and Arnold Worldwide, the campaign threw decades of scare tactics under the bus in favor of something new—the fact that tobacco companies had been lying to us for generations, making fools of us. David Baldwin of Raleigh, North Carolina-based agency Baldwin& put it like this: "Truth moved antismoking advertising from 'It's bad for you' to 'You're being lied to by the man.' It was brilliant." And this from Mark Musto: "Funny

how the anger over being manipulated was more powerful than the fear of cancer."

The authentic truth. It's absolute. It's unshakeable. Its power to propel us as creatives mighty beyond measure. But there is another truth. It is feeble. It is disingenuous. And it is something we've rarely seen before. The kind of truth that's fleeting. Fabricated. Cloaked in insincerity. And if we're not careful, it can lure us onto a bandwagon that at best is uncomfortable and at worst can suck the spirit out of us. Call it the inauthentic truth.

We all want to ally ourselves with brands that have hitched their star to a purpose. Who doesn't want that? Who wouldn't want to work on a Patagonia, a Ben & Jerry's, a Dove—brands that found their true north long ago, way before purpose became trendier than a retro flip phone or a pair of Louis Vuitton workout pants.

But what about the brands that are late to the party, that feel compelled to stand for something more than just a great car or a phenomenal running shoe or the smartphone to end all smartphones for no other reason than it's what the market expects right now. I don't need to spell it out for you. You know who they are. The poseurs. The opportunists. The ones that are willing to embrace any cause, any movement, any social activism if it means getting

themselves a place at the table.

The question for each of us as creatives is: What happens if instead of the Patagonias of the world, you find yourself working for one of the poseurs? What if most days, it feels like you're the only one still looking for the authentic truth, when sadly there is nothing of the sort to be found?

It would be so easy to jump on that bandwagon with all the other pretenders. It's your career, after all. It's not your fault you work on a brand hell-bent on trying to make itself out to be something it's not. You put your head down. You do the best work you can. Never mind that up to a year ago, your client wouldn't have cared about taking a stand against racism or global warming, but it does now to win customer loyalty. Not your fault. Not your fault. Not your fault.

And yet. **ca**



Good Grief

Throughout my life, from adolescence to adulthood, my mom would say to me, “You are so lucky. You own your art.”

This was a layered observation. On one level, she meant that I was lucky to have a passion that consistently held my attention, like drawing every day after school. She also meant that I owned a visceral way of encountering the world, like turning onto a street full of bright yellow taxicabs and feeling the shock of their color.

My mom was actually referring to my “artistic practice,” a term neither of us knew back then. Over the years, my practice has become deeper: a source of enjoyment, learning and stern self-interrogation. I’ve also found that my artistic practice provides a foundation when I encounter life’s painful realities—in particular, losing people I love.

Artists have always dealt with the subject of death and its tributaries of grief. It is perhaps the most ubiquitous topic in art history, with famous representations of mourning ranging from allegorical and religious, to metaphorical, autobiographical and conceptual. Consider Douris’s *Eos and Memnon* vase painting, Michelangelo’s *Pietà*, Robert Mapplethorpe’s *Self Portrait* and Motoi Yamamoto’s installation *Return to the Sea: Saltworks*.

As an artist, you use your practice to translate loss into something new. Your life undergoes a major shift, and you call upon your familiar knowledge: the themes of your past work, your materials and vocabulary, your sensibility and aesthetic. Making art while grieving is a continuation of your artistic practice, with a unique contradiction: the tension between the sweet immersion of creating and the simultaneous pull of sorrow.

To better understand my own process, I wanted to know how other artists use their practice to convert their experience of loss into tangible expression. I had seen the work of Brooklyn-based artist Nene Humphrey, whose profound performances and installations dealing with mourning moved me long before I had experienced a traumatic loss myself. I asked her to join me for coffee at a favorite neighborhood café.

Humphrey’s expansive, evolving project *Circling the Center* is the very definition of multimedia. She includes drawing, sculpture, video, poetry, music and performance. This was not always the case.

Back in 2005, as a long-term (and current) artist-in-residence at New York University’s LeDoux Lab, Humphrey had been making drawings

based on imagery of the brain’s amygdala, an almond-shaped mass with thousands of neurons that help process emotions. A year after she began this work, her husband died unexpectedly of cancer. As she searched for ways to articulate her grief, she happened upon the Victorian art of mourning braiding, and was struck by the visual and psychological similarities between the braiding and her drawings. Her artistic practice soon underwent a transformation in depth and breadth.

As we talked, Humphrey explained the organic ways in which she sought and allowed radical changes to her art making.

“The death of my husband allowed me to get into my work as I never have before,” she said. “I still have the core of what I do as an artist. But I never would have taken that many chances. I was so willing to fail—almost not thinking—not rationally plotting it out.”


Humphrey felt the need to make the work richer. “I started to collaborate,” she said, “because I didn’t know how to do certain things, like video and sound. I was being open to what can happen. [In my previous work,] I had made all the decisions. I had never really collaborated, but now I had willingness.”

I asked Humphrey about the contradiction of grieving while making art: the feeling of deep sadness juxtaposed with the creative fulfillment of discovering the right expression for the work.

She replied, “You’re using the experience; your experience is going into the work.” Then she told me this story:

“When Benny was dying, there was his different breathing, and I went into the room with my tape recorder and recorded it, and then put the recorder away on a shelf. Later, I was talking with my collaborator Roberto [Roberto Carlos Lange, a musician and sound designer] about patterns and I said, ‘I have this tape.’ There was a moment when I thought, ‘Am I going to tell Roberto about the tape?’ But I had to. And he took that sound and used it.”

“It’s so beautiful,” she added, “this rhythmic breathing. I wanted it in there.”

We can’t predict how difficult times will affect or alter our lives. But as artists, we can call upon our well-honed artistic practice—this thing we are lucky enough to own—to allow grief to reside in our creative work. 

Thinking Inside the Subscription Box



© Stefano Azario

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Base Design developed the brand strategy, identity, website design and unpacking experience for Kidbox, a subscription service for kids' fashion. This image of a girl peeking into a Kidbox (left) suggests the fun and anticipation of receiving a Kidbox in the mail. Along with clothes, a box also includes fun stickers, crayons and toys (right), evoking the mission of the company: unpacking happiness.

There's an automatic sense of excitement upon spying a new cardboard box by your doorstep. That's part of why subscription boxes have exploded in popularity within the past few years. Subscribers sign up to receive a box delivered to their home on a quarterly, monthly or sometimes weekly basis, and inside that box is a treasure trove of goods selected by experts or personalized to the subscriber's taste. Also known as curation subscription services, some of the most successful companies include Blue Apron, the meal-kit delivery box; Birchbox, the provider of beauty products; Stitch Fix, a personal shopping service; and NatureBox, which feeds the masses with healthy snacks. Major retailers have entered this digital marketplace as well, including Sephora, Target and Walmart.

Before subscription boxes, there were similar product-of-the-month clubs, but those weren't so tailored to specific desires. The recent wave of curated boxes is indicative of the preference for bespoke experiences. And the market is huge: a 2018 study by marketing analytics company Hitwise estimates that 18.5 million people in the United States are subscription box shoppers, who could be subscribing to anything from niche boxes full of nerdy figurines to survivalist products to housewares imported from Japan. According to that same study, the market has grown by a whopping 890 percent since 2014.

So, how are designers approaching this space?

"What I think is particular about the subscription service model is the limited interactions," says Min Lew, creative director at Base

Design in New York. "Retentions with the brand season after season become really important. The onboarding process, the unboxing experience and what the brand allows you to do have to be especially more gratifying and engaging."

By their nature, curation subscription services thrive off of the element of surprise. Subscribers often have no idea what they're going to get, so the experience is wrapped up in anticipation and a grand unveiling. Designers are capitalizing on that idea as they work with these businesses.

One company with a particularly elaborate and interactive so-called "unboxing experience" is Kidbox, a subscription service that provides a personalized selection of kids' clothing. Lew handled the design and identity work for Kidbox, including the unboxing plans. "We intuitively and instinctively knew that was an emotional moment," she says. "Of course it needs to come in a box, but how do we own that experience so that it's memorable for the kid and also the parent? ... We wanted [the box] to have a second life beyond [being] the vessel that carries the clothing."

The boxes are decked out with black-and-white outlined words and images, and when kids open the boxes, they find an explosion of bright colors and patterns, as well as stickers and crayons. It's immediately clear that the box is meant to be personalized and colored. "That box becomes your box," Lew says. "You start to create this emotional engagement and anticipation for the next box. It's never only about the clothing. We're building multiple layers of engagement points."