

INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION

JUDGING PANEL: M/M (PARIS) (PRÉSIDENTS), XAVIER ANTIN,
DIDIER LESTRADE, OLYMPIA LE-TAN, DANIEL MANSON,
FANETTE MELLIER.
APRIL 2011

Dear Mathias and Michaël,

I'm writing to you about the Festival's international competition, for which you've agreed to chair this year's panel of judges.

(...)
As our discussions progressed, your request was underscored by your stringent standards and broadness of outlook, and by your intellect too. Your perspective greatly contributed to my own view on what the competition should be –driven, but not defined, by the competitive spirit. On your advice, this year's competition has evolved in several respects. There is no longer a pre-selection panel; and, most notably, the competition is open to all media used by graphic designers, and no longer just posters. This is an important shift. Like most 'biennials' devoted to graphic design, Chaumont has developed around an encounter between town and medium, which has been the Festival's engine for 20 years. It's an important change because today, only a small minority of graphic designers claim the title of *affichiste*, or poster designer; and a growing number are affirming themselves as graphic designers, although they do not always–yet–feel concerned by the profession's gatherings, or by the opportunities it creates to make contact with the public. We know there was never any question of undermining the poster genre as such, or of hastening any kind of decline—you yourselves have been making posters for the CDDB in Lorient for 15 years.

On the contrary, our common project, which is starting with you and will run over several years, involves creating a situation that fosters an understanding of the relevance of each medium and each graphic language, in contexts where they are used appropriately. To this end, you also proposed to open up the judging panel to kinds of intelligence from beyond graphic design: a print finishing specialist, a fashion designer, and journalists.

(...)
It is up to us to be clear about how the winning selection was arrived at, and to find the best way of supporting it, so that the exhibits are presented in the best way for sharing. The top prize, bestowed unanimously, is in itself a response, by dint of its stature and internal organisation. But several clarifications are needed. We are doubtless asking many changes of the competition and of the profession itself, but this is how the competition will be able to change and open up without becoming weaker. We must therefore ask a lot of ourselves: be capable of attracting entries that vindicate our wish to open up. Posters aside, the objects submitted this year were creditable in terms of quality, but there were few of them, and so no selection was justified.

(...)
Chaumont cannot be satisfied with the trust of its own graphic family, and must do what it takes to convince other graphic designers to send us their work, and to attract external figures capable of enriching the judging panel's discussions. If I'm writing you this letter today, it's also to suggest that you reply. Your letter could set out your definition of a graphic-design competition, your conviction that graphic design can change the world, the criteria drawn up by your judging panel, and what these two days working with us have taught you.

^ Étienne Hervy's letter addressed to Mathias Augustyniak and Michaël Amzalag after the jury's deliberation.

> Excerpts from the letter "A Poster Competition is not a Horse Show", Mathias Augustyniak. In the 2011 International Poster and Graphic Design Festival of Chaumont's catalogue.

Dear Étienne,

(...)
When we want to catch the truth, it often escapes us. In all honesty, dreams seem easier to catch than reality. While judging this poster competition in Chaumont, we together experienced moments of true reality. Michaël and I greatly enjoyed forming a panel of judges with complementary and even contradictory expertise. We wanted to produce a human bouquet that would yield polyphonic discussions.

(...)
None of the judges is a graphic designer, strictly speaking, and yet they all handle and decipher images, signs and clues with outrageously humane brilliance. Each is an author on the scale of their story, and possesses their own language. Despite this multiplicity of complementary but also very contradictory viewpoints, remember, Étienne, how we all 'fell' into agreement, like a body thudding into snow, that Cornel Windlin's work for the theatre in Zurich surpassed all the other entries. Windlin did not submit one poster; he sent in 50 or 100–no, make that a thousand. He also sent a magnificent sign, a black circle.

(...)
The 2011 competition judges decided that there would not be first, second and third prize winners, as in a horse show, but only a winner. The exhibition you are now devising with Windlin's proposition will readily explain the judges' decision. With the other entries, we struggled to pinpoint logical sequences, and therefore made a selection as if drilling a core, in order to understand the geology of a piece of land. We collected specimens to make up a cabinet of curiosities that could provide a snapshot of contemporary graphic output. All things considered, the selection is like a bouquet of flowers symptomatic of a geography and a temporality. The judges were driven to probe the depths of their subjectivity.

(...)
I now understand, Étienne, writing you this letter, that you came to fetch Michaël and I in the same way that the moustachioed Mexican with the very black hair in *The Magnificent Seven* by John Sturges sought out Yul Brynner and then Steve McQueen to deal with Caldera (Eli Wallach), the thuggish Mexican mafioso who, with his gang of outlaws, is bleeding a Mexican village dry. Caldera terrifies the villagers, then plunders them. As a result, they forget they possess a super-power that makes them indestructible: their ability to construct their own reality (symbolised by their village in the film) in parallel with actual reality; inside their reality, they can recharge endlessly and tap the power to overcome a group that exists only through its insatiable desire to consume in the immediate present. The film stages a dialogue between two attitudes to the world: one that consists of re-programming it by producing parallel functional realities that are articulated with actual reality; and another that simply involves consuming actual reality by forgetting that it is projected by those that experience it, and therefore belongs to them. Actual reality is not supposed to be consumed or sold; it is meant to be lived, experienced. To exist is to take part in actual reality by imprinting one's intimate humanity on it, in a gesture of profound generosity.

(...)
Yes, Étienne, Michaël and I agreed to chair the Chaumont competition because we believe that graphic designers are authors and artists, perpetually redefining their practice, in the sense that making graphic design involves handling images, signs and clues in order to articulate messages on every scale within every reality, whatever their temporal or spatial textures, with the aim of living better in the world we are passing through. Being a graphic designer is also a profession: not all graphic designers are authors, just as not all contemporary artists are authors; some are only great professionals, and that's fine. To elegantly articulate images, signs and clues to the reality of the world, in order to make symphonies of conversations whose consistency is akin to Yves Klein's 'zones of immaterial pictorial sensibility', is a beautiful journey that brings happiness.