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ART / IDENTITY

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ART

The designer of today re-establishes the long lost contact between art and the public, between living people and art as a living thing. Instead of pictures for the drawing room, electric gadgets for the kitchen. **There should be no such thing as art divorced from life,** with beautiful things to look at and hideous things to use. If what we use every day is made with art, and not thrown together by chance or by caprice, then **we shall have nothing to hide.**

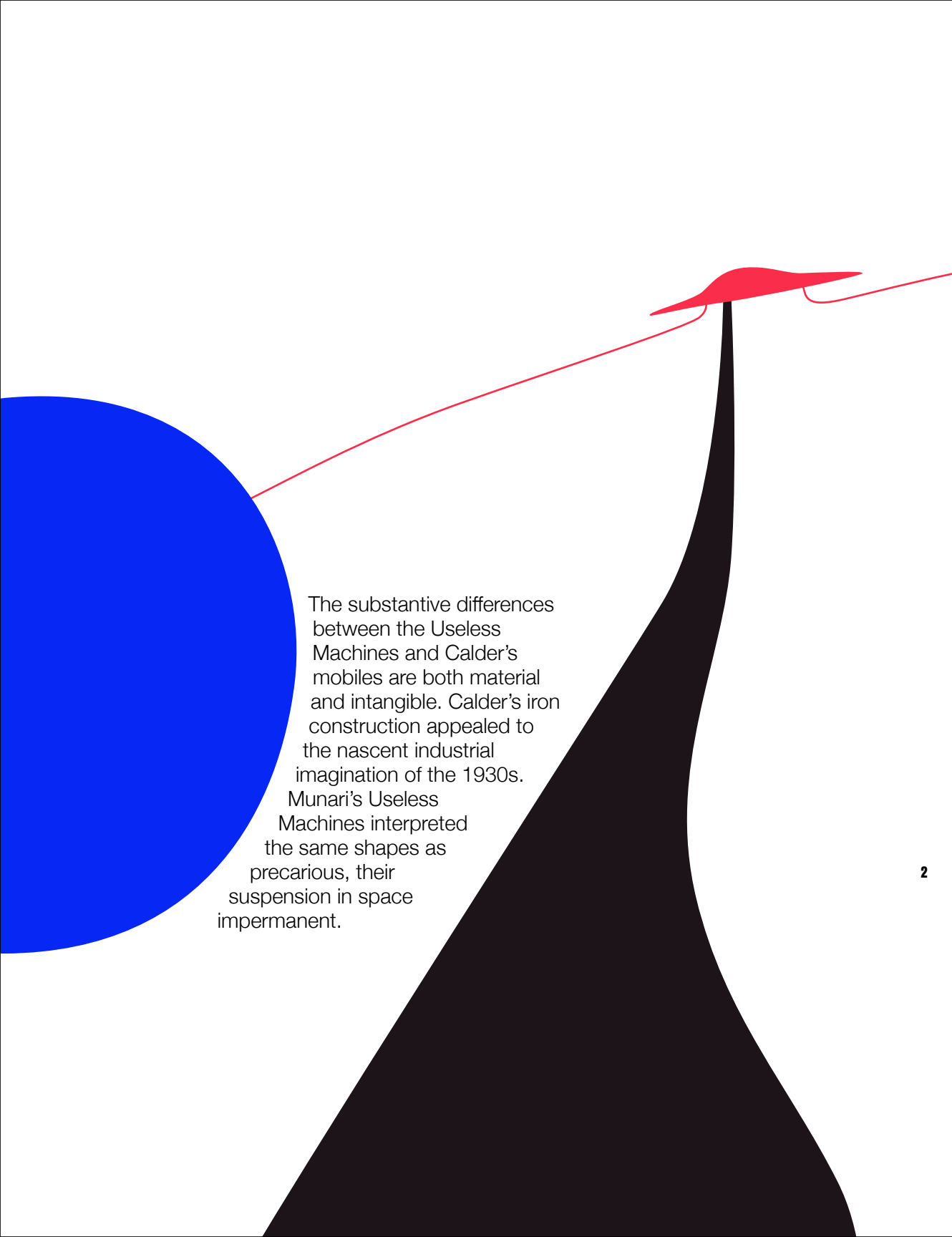
— Bruno Munari

Beginning in the mid-century, the fashionable (and profitable) role of the artist as a culture vulture and consumer critic engaged indelibly with elements of design practice and the marketability of a commercial self. The multimodal implications of the branded artist have rippled through postmodern and contemporary design discourse and practice.

Several artists and designers have distilled this cultural obsession with the artist as brand, carrying the trope to its extremes. The branded artist uncovers larger conflicts in the pursuit of success — the art world's incestuous marriage to external market forces and its irrevocable

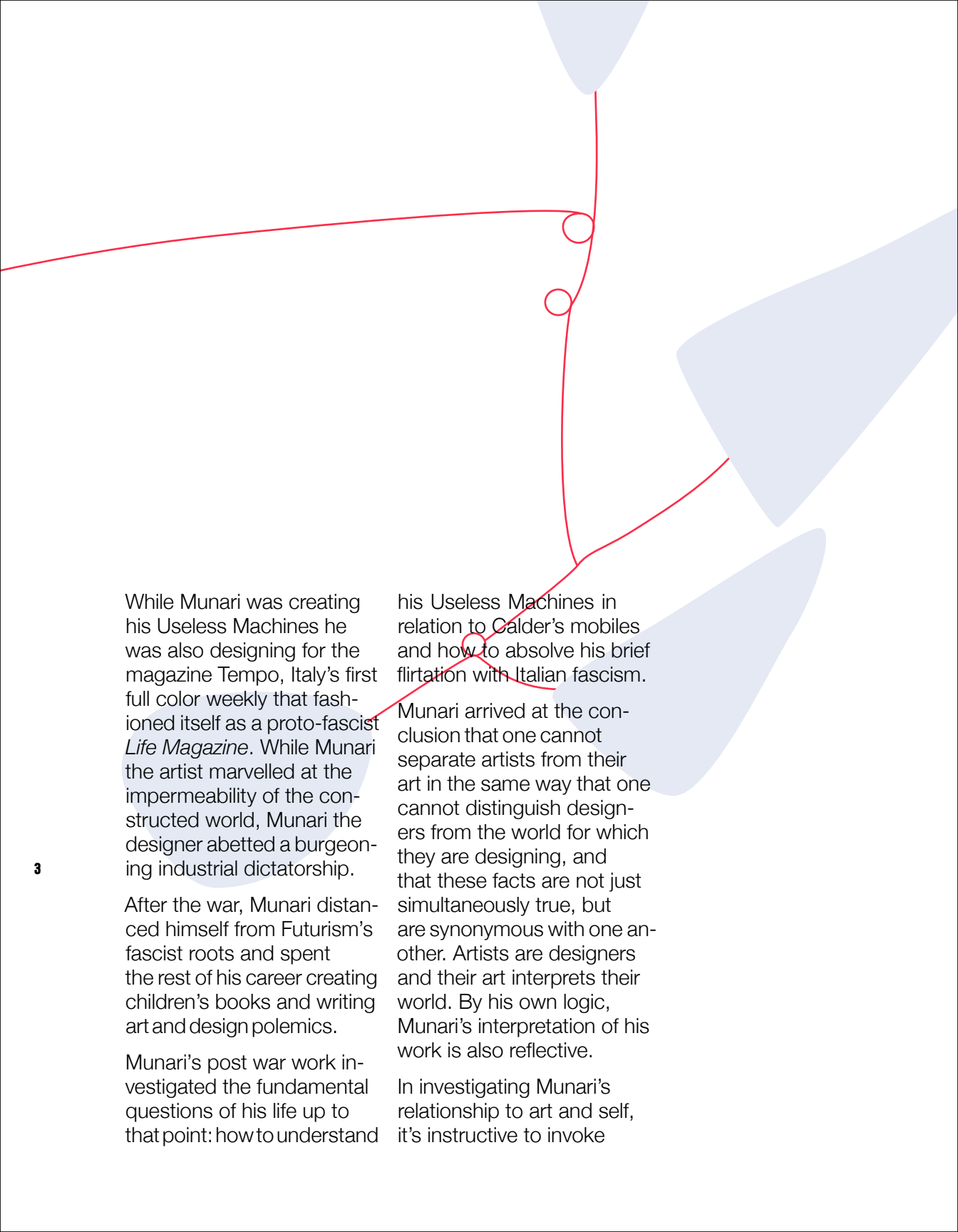
relationship to design. Bruno Munari, Andy Warhol, and Damien Hirst have negotiated contradictions between the conventions of visual art, their mass production strategies, and their branded selves, all of which are increasingly consumable and reproducible.

Bruno Munari, a 20th century Milanese artist and designer was most famous for his *Useless Machines*, painted cardboard and glass structures strung together with thread and wooden dowels. In form and presentation Munari's *Useless Machines* although the former were regarded with derision and the latter hailed as Modernist masterpieces.



The substantive differences between the Useless Machines and Calder's mobiles are both material and intangible. Calder's iron construction appealed to the nascent industrial imagination of the 1930s. Munari's Useless Machines interpreted the same shapes as precarious, their suspension in space impermanent.

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While Munari was creating his Useless Machines he was also designing for the magazine *Tempo*, Italy's first full color weekly that fashioned itself as a proto-fascist *Life Magazine*. While Munari the artist marvelled at the impermeability of the constructed world, Munari the designer abetted a burgeoning industrial dictatorship.

After the war, Munari distanced himself from Futurism's fascist roots and spent the rest of his career creating children's books and writing art and design polemics.

Munari's post war work investigated the fundamental questions of his life up to that point: how to understand

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his Useless Machines in relation to Calder's mobiles and how to absolve his brief flirtation with Italian fascism.

Munari arrived at the conclusion that one cannot separate artists from their art in the same way that one cannot distinguish designers from the world for which they are designing, and that these facts are not just simultaneously true, but are synonymous with one another. Artists are designers and their art interprets their world. By his own logic, Munari's interpretation of his work is also reflective.

In investigating Munari's relationship to art and self, it's instructive to invoke

INTERPRETATION AMOUNTS TO THE PHILISTINE REFUSAL TO LEAVE THE WORK OF ART ALONE. REAL ART HAS THE CAPACITY TO MAKE US NERVOUS. BY REDUCING THE WORK OF ART TO ITS CONTENT AND THEN INTERPRETING THAT ONE TAMES THE WORK OF ART. INTERPRETATION MAKES ART MANAGEABLE.

Susan Sontag's writing on art criticism:

"In most modern instances, interpretation amounts to the philistine refusal to leave the work of art alone. Real art has the capacity to make us nervous. By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, comfortable."

An artist's interpretation of his or her own art is thus a gesture unto itself, genuinely experienced and consciously constructed. In a post-modern context this often takes the form of an artist's brand, an echo of a self that the artist has cultivated and commodified.

Warhol's career revolved around the production of the

ultimate consumer good – himself. Celebrity, brand, superstar, artist, savant, Warhol revelled in the mechanisms of his fame.

Beginning as a commercial artist with a degree in pictorial design, Warhol was intimately familiar with the identity strategies he would eventually exploit. Warhol mastered images; his artistic output toyed with an innate understanding of visual culture and its function as a fundamental social force.

Warhol's idea that "everyone will be famous for 15 minutes" comments on a world in which image reigns supreme and traditional artistic values like genius and singularity are obsolete. As viewers we



Fig 1.
Andy
Warhol,
Campbell's
Soup I:
Tomato
(FS 11.46),
1968

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can not separate Warhol's self from his brand, which evolved into a commercial personality over the course of his career. Warhol's reputation derives from his prolific output and his omnipresence as a famous figure and celebrity endorser. Warhol's brand functioned through a sort of cultural Möbius strip, creating a culture that he simultaneously curated, and critiqued.

The Soup Can series (Fig. 1) encapsulates Warhol's obsession with the detachment of mass circulated brands, questioning the line between high art, good design, and consumer culture. The Soup Can series functions under the premise that while the Campbell's brand denotes preserved soup, it also connotes nostalgia, middle class, and comfort convenience.

Immersed in the artistic tradition of the still life, Warhol's Soup Can prints reinterpret a common item and create a contingent object, an easily fabricated and highly context dependent art piece.

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Warhol's soup cans are in part designed, meaningful through their relationships to personal and commercial brand equity to serve an emotional utility.

Warhol embraced the mythological apparatuses of his identity and total control over his articulated brand narrative. Warhol was famously prone to claiming that his assistants created many of the works that he had actually produced himself. Later in his career Warhol went so far as to facetiously assert that his assistant "actually painted [his] pictures," causing widespread panic among his buyers until he was eventually forced to recant.¹

Warhol concocted so many stories about himself that in hindsight fact is at times indiscernible from fiction. The salience then of the artist's "signature" in postmodern art is not as a marker of authenticity but as a brand identifier, a logo behind which lies a series of careful maneuvers manifesting as a body of artistic work.

Contemporary artists borrow from design's concern with identity creation and reputation construction to establish the value and constancy of their art.

Nearly 50 years after Andy Warhol's Factory days, Damien Hirst trades on his commercial brand more effectively than almost any other living artist. Hirst's \$100 million diamond encrusted skull, *For the Love of God* (Fig. 2) epitomizes the significance of symbolic relevance to an artist's brand identity and the subsequent value assigned to their work. Hirst first rose to fame pickling sharks, cows, and sheep as the leader of the Young British Artists group in the 1990s. By the 2007 debut of *For the Love of God*, the *New York Times* succinctly assessed that "having created his brand, [Hirst] found he could sell almost anything."²

The creation of the skull was contextually significant, hinting at the gluttonous excesses of the contemporary art world, and a PR

stunt that would become the literal crown jewel in the construction of the Hirst brand, now synonymous with irreverence and triumphant vapidness. The skull's price tag was indeed part of the work itself. In this conflation of sign and signifier, Hirst fashioned his work through deliberate choices that effectively capitalized on his brand image rather than a deeply personal connection between himself, his viewer, and his art.

The blurring of art and design does not occur in a vacuum, nor is contemporary art's appropriation of design thinking one-sided. The economy of exchange between art and design is worth considering. Design provides artists with profitable modes of brand expression, while fine art equips designers with visual specificity and efficacy.

The avant-garde design movements of the early 20th century – De Stijl in The Netherlands, the Bauhaus in Germany, and the Constructivists in Russia

Fig 2.
Damien
Hirst.
For the
Love of
God,
2007



– all approached art's role in the design process.

Dada, Futurist, and Constructivist artists and designers explored textual visual communication in addition to more traditional modes of artistic expression.³ Eschewing the distinctions between the fine and applied arts that these

artists had inherited, they began to view functional perception as integral to their self-expressive goals.⁴

The Russian Constructivists maintained their identities as individual artists while also crafting the totalitarian visual voice of the Communist Party.

The Dada, Futurist, and Constructivist exploitation of the verbal-visual dichotomy was a radical rejection of the text tradition.

The Baroque Modernists in Basel reinterpreted and subverted visual traditions.

The Baroque Modernists grew out of Classical Modernism, a graphic expression that stressed a syntactic grammar of design in which typography was to be read and imagery was to be seen through strictly separate, conventional modes.⁵ Wolfgang Weingart initiated a substantial body of work with his students in the 1960s that pushed Modernist experiments to their extremes.⁶ Expanding upon the Swiss concern for structure and composition, Weingart and his students experimented with increasingly complex grids and adventurous typography.

The resulting compositions abandoned Swiss conventions in favor of highly formal, painterly works of design (fig. 3). The Baroque Modernists discovered through their rebelliousness and irreverence that type could be read and seen. Shifting focus from Swiss semantics introduced new, unexplored possibilities for the dynamic integration of type as image rather

THE BAUHAUS STRIVES TO COORDINATE ALL CREATIVE EFFORT, TO ACHIEVE ... THE UNIFICATION OF ALL TRAINING IN ART AND DESIGN. THE ULTIMATE, IF DISTANT, GOAL OF THE BAUHAUS IS THE COLLECTIVE WORK OF ART ... IN WHICH NO BARRIERS EXIST BETWEEN THE STRUCTURAL AND DECORATIVE ARTS.

Fig 3.
Dan
Friedman.
Typografische
Monatsblätter.
Cover
no. 1.
1971



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than the static partition of type and image. In his 1923 pedagogical manifesto “The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus,” Walter Gropius wrote that:

“The Bauhaus strives to coordinate all creative effort, to achieve ... the unification of all training in art and design. The ultimate, if distant, goal of the Bauhaus is the collective work of art ... in which no barriers exist between the structural and decorative arts.”⁷

Despite Gropius’s muscular theorizing, the post-war dissemination of Bauhaus dogma bastardized his utopian vision of “design is one.”

A more flexible approach to art is crucial for design. In exploring the boundaries of art and design, I do not intend to erase the distinctions between the two. Rather I suggest that in a contemporary context, the rigid walls separating art from design have become less tenable than ever before. The commodification of contemporary art and the ubiquity of the branded artist have rendered historical models bifurcating the decorative and applied arts obsolete. As design democratizes and contemporary art stratifies, identity creation serves as a useful bridge between the two. Engaging art’s role in design and

design’s in art creates new avenues for meaningful and expressive visual discourse.

Between 1966 and 1969, six Chicago artists — Jim Falconer, Art Green, Gladys Nilsson, Jim Nutt, Suellen Rocca, and Karl Wirsum, all recent graduates of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) — exhibited together under the name **Hairy Who.**

**AT ONCE STRATEGIC, VISCERAL,
AND PROVOCATIVE, BRANDING
THEMSELVES AS THE HAIRY
WHO GALVANIZED THE GROUP'S
FOUR YEARS OF COLLECTIVE
ENTERPRISE.**

“WE WERE A COLLECTIVE BECAUSE WE WANTED TO BE COLLECTED.”

Over the course of the Hairy Who's six exhibitions, the group amassed a remarkable portfolio of self-designed promotional materials. Notably separate from Modernist uniformity and the Pop Art's self-deference, the Hairy Who's visual brand was a foil to the consumer arts culture in which it was also a participant.

The result was a cascading, oozing visual discourse that included the production of posters, zines, comics, exhibition environments, and other printed ephemera. The evident time, effort, and cost of crafting these branded materials indicates that the Hairy Who held a vested interest in refining and

projecting their visual identity. The Hairy Who's "brand" was a self-conscious farce that transformed a cohort of unlovable artists into a single, marketable commodity. Unlike previous generations of artists, the Hairy Who was not a movement grounded in specific ideological convictions or strict formal similarities. As Green has recalled "we were a collective because we wanted to be collected." In this sense, the Hairy Who was paradoxically a branded endeavor and an artistic project: equally mercurial and mercantile, idiosyncratic and intentional. Through an analysis of the designed ephemera associated with

the Hairy Who's six exhibitions, I will examine the Hairy Who's identity as an act of visual myth making that invoked the shifting mid-century distinctions between art and design and the ubiquity of the branded artist as a cultural subject.

The historical and artistic relevance of the Hairy Who's various projects have been considered extensively in academic research. However, the design of the group's visual identity has been largely ignored in the art historical literature. Several art historians have attempted to contextualize the Hairy Who within a series of 20th century Chicago art movements.⁸



Art historian Franz Shulze first christened this loose coalition of mid-century Chicagoan Surrealists, Expressionists, and Anti-Modernists the Chicago Imagists, a categorical association under

which many of the Hairy Who artists bristled.

Avoiding any consideration of the Hairy Who's design of branded material, Shulze favored a flattened analysis of the artists' individual works. Shulze's linear historical conclusion is thus limited, we cannot separate the art of Falconer, Green, Nilsson, Nutt, Rocca, and Wirsum from their roles as the brand architects of the Hairy Who. The substance of the Hairy Who's visual identity and its position within a broader design history offers an alternative context for the group's significance.

The Hairy Who's relationship to Chicago's mid-century art scene shaped their unique approach to self-promotion. Chicago's galleryless postwar arts culture laid the foundation for the Hairy Who's collectivist brand

strategy. Unlike New York, Chicago wouldn't develop a structured gallery scene until 1952.⁹ Excluded from juried shows at the Art Institute of Chicago, a group of young Chicago artists and designers, nicknamed the Monster Roster, formed the Momentum group in 1947 to organize their own shows. Distinguished members of the art and design establishment juried Momentum's exhibitions, including Josef Albers, Mies van de Rohe, and Ad Reinhardt.¹⁰ Momentum's exhibiting designers created elaborate catalogues to accompany their shows.

By 1957, the year of Momentum's final exhibition, the group's shows had proved a successful strategy for the exhibiting young artists and designers who were hungry for recognition. The Hairy Who was in many ways an extension of Momentum and the Monster Roster; the group named themselves, branded their exhibitions, and designed their own collectables. However the Hairy Who's insularity, both in its fixed membership and its anarchical resentment of the artistic elite, contradicted Momentum's fundamental purpose.

THE HAIRY WHO WAS A BRANDED EXPERIMENT — A VOICE FOR THE SHIFTING ROLE OF AN ARTIST'S AGENCY IN AN ERA DEFINED BY EXPERIMENTATION AND CREATIVE PLURALISM

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Momentum and the Monster Roster developed the first 20th century artistic “identity” for Chicago, which afforded the Hairy Who the freedom to deviate from it years later.

The group’s visual and vernacular identity was a pragmatic alignment of the artists’ common goals. Because the Hairy Who members created their art in parallel, their branded ephemera served as the only outlet through which they communicated collectively. The Hairy Who’s irreverent manipulation of language formed the core of their brand identity.

The group’s name Hairy Who exemplifies how language became a tool for the artists to express their collaborative ethos. The Hairy Who promoted a series of conflicting stories regarding the genesis of their nickname. The moniker’s prevailing origin story begins with the first meeting of all six artists in 1965. While discussing the WFMT radio art critic Harry Bouras, Karl Wirsum questioned “Harry Who?

Who is this guy.”¹¹ At first incredulous then intrigued, the artists twisted Harry into Hairy and discovered HairyWho. Another common rumor involved the name referencing Henry Geldzahler, the contemporary art critic and Andy Warhol acolyte.¹² At other times, the HairyWho insisted that their name materialized out of thin air, fully formed.¹³ The truth of the name remains elusive, but it speaks volumes that a group of six artists who exhibited together only six times over four years promulgated at least three distinct origin stories. The Hairy Who carefully crafted a bewildering self-mythology that became the cornerstone of their collective identity. From the moment the Hairy Who burst onto Chicago’s contemporary art scene in 1966, they prioritized an equally vexing visual identity. The first Hairy Who exhibition was scheduled to open in February at the Hyde Park Arts Center (HPAC).¹⁴ Located well off the beaten path on the city’s South Side during one of the coldest

months of the year, the artists were concerned about attracting the attention that had initially motivated them to organize their exhibition. The Hairy Who adopted their infamous self-promotional strategies out of necessity; they needed to entice people to attend their exhibition and had to present a compelling visual argument for their novel approach to group shows. The poster that the artists designed to advertise the first Hairy Who exhibition (Fig. 4) successfully conveyed their decentralized yet co-dependent relationship to one other.

The poster publicizing the first Hairy Who exhibition engaged the artists' egalitarian collectivism and illustrated the objectives and strategies that characterized their visual identity, which remained remarkably consistent over the group's four active years. The poster showcases the artists as individuals, together.¹⁵

Re-enacting the Surrealist parlor game exquisite corpse, each artist "tattooed" his or her unique insignia or inscription onto the poster's central figure: a shirtless torso pictured from the back that Wirsum had originally drawn. Some of the emblems are signed, others are stylized renderings of the contributing artist's name,

and many are unattributed. The poster clearly invokes a reference to tattoo flash, the common designs displayed on the walls of tattoo shops, positioning the group at the edge of the acceptable cultural lexicon. The Hairy Who's name is shaved into the back of the figure's

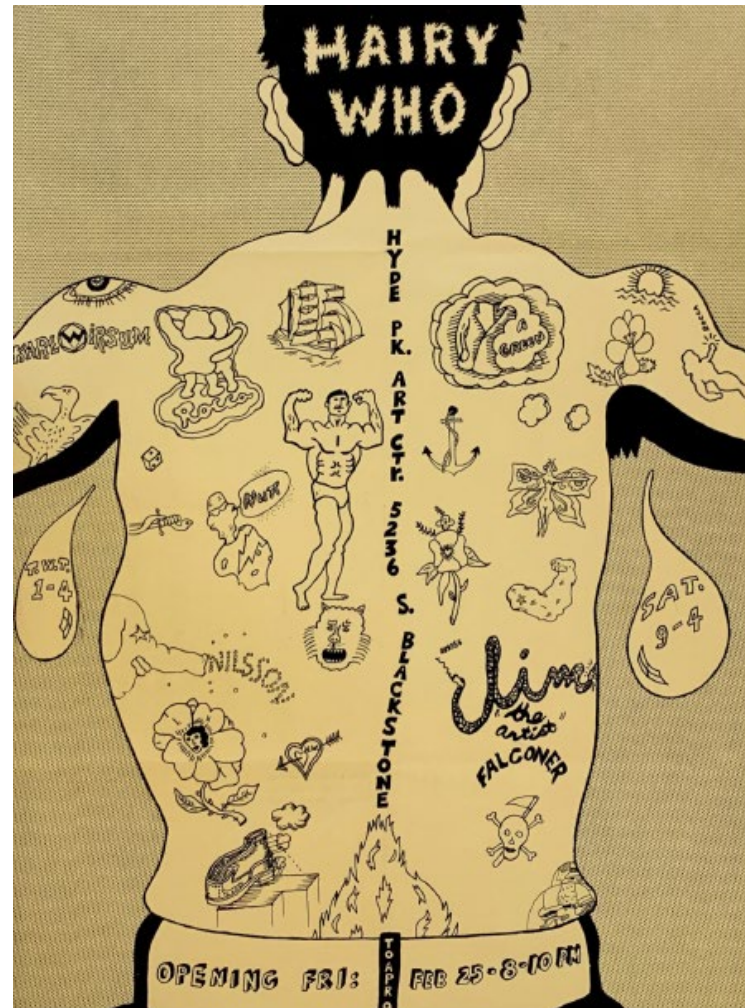


Fig. 4. Poster for Hairy Who, 1966

hair. HPAC's address forms the literal backbone of the poster and its operating hours emerge from the exaggerated perspiration

Fig. 5. Poster for Karl Wirsum's solo exhibition. C.A. Doctor, 1967

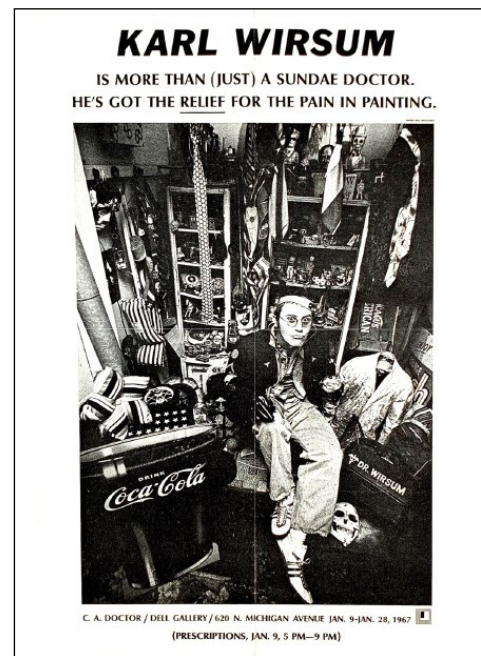


Fig. 6. The poster for Jim Nutt's 1974 solo exhibition



dripping from the figure's woolly underarms. The poster's sentimental vulgarity strikes at the heart of the Hairy Who's visual vernacular.

Contrasting the posters publicizing the Hairy Who's first exhibition with those designed for the member

artists' various solo shows reveals that the group's collective visual brand was the result of deliberate design decision making rather than an arbitrary amalgamation of the six artists' diverse creative styles. As the Hairy Who gained popularity following their inaugural group show in 1966, many of the individual artists were celebrated with their own exhibitions in major galleries. Karl

Wirsum exhibited a series of paintings at Dell Gallery in 1967. The promotional poster (Fig. 5) for Wirsum's solo show C.A. Doctor differs dramatically from the work he designed for the first Hairy Who exhibition poster. The solo show

poster's large black and white photograph, sans-serif type, and centered composition are unrecognizably different from the eccentric, illustrative posters created for the Hairy Who.

Jim Nutt's poster for his 1974 solo exhibition at the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art also deviates from the Hairy Who's established design identity (Fig. 6). While created four years after the group's dissolution, Nutt's scenic, theatrical design for his own poster is still notably different from the Hairy Who's signature graphic eclecticism. The Hairy Who communicated a radically different visual message through the design of their promotional posters than they did for their own solo shows. The distinction between the artists' individual and collective identities is essential to the Hairy Who's brand strategy.

he designed for the first Hairy Who exhibition poster. The solo show



**THE HAIRY WHO
EXAGGERATED AND
PARODIED MID
CENTURY CHICAGO'S
CREATIVE IDENTITY
CRISIS.**

Chicago's tortured relationship to Modernism in the midcentury framed the Hairy Who's approach to their visual identity. The contradictions between postwar Chicago's Modernist design thinking and its Surrealist arts culture shaped the structure and style of the Hairy Who's articulated brand. After World War II, an anti-formalist neo-surrealism took hold among Chicago's young artists. Joseph Shapiro, the founding president of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago described the city's artistic sensibilities in the 1950s, "We were attracted to Ernst, Tanguy, Magritte, Delveaux, Matta, Klee, and early Chagall... These works possessed a power and authority of image, symbol or metaphor that imbued them with a magical 'presence.'"¹⁶

Chicago's artists and collectors were drawn to art that glorified the absurd and explored distinct visions of the self. It proves a paradox that postwar Chicago was

also home to Maholy-Nagy's New Bauhaus and Mies van der Rohe's architecture practice. The New Bauhaus, which later became the Institute of Design, may have pedagogically emphasized the integration of the artist/designer into the modern world, but in practice the work of its students and faculty read as coolly impersonal and incuriously aloof.¹⁷

At the Illinois Institute of Technology, Mies van der Rohe established an architectural style of uncompromising clarity, order, and discipline.¹⁸ The conflict between mid-century Chicago Modernists and Surrealists belied a local scepticism that an imposed "good design" could definitively shape a better world. Neither Modernist nor Surrealist, the commercial intent of the Hairy Who's design work negates the art of surreal intuition while it's calculated illegibility denies any claim to modernist rationality. The Hairy Who developed a series of compositional idioms to define

their amorphous visual identity. The group's strategic application of color, type, and form supported the vulgar anti-formalism that the group projected through their messaging. The myriad of compositional strategies that the Hairy Who derived from historical and pop cultural sources produced a versatile, explosive visual language consistent across two and three dimensional space. The promotional poster designed for the Hairy Who II exhibition expanded upon the visual strategies that the group used in their first exhibition poster (Fig. 7).

The poster advertizing the Hairy Who II show consists of a chaotic and crowded two color composition. The artists again employed an exquisite corpse technique to develop the poster's central figure. However, unlike the poster for the first Hairy Who exhibition, the artists' individual contributions to the second poster are less discrete. Each artist created a limb or body part for the nebulous,

humanoid figure. The bulbous illustration is rendered in flat color and encased in dark outlines.

While the illustration's two-dimensionality lacks a traditional partition of foreground, middle ground and background, the figure's contorted, undulating limbs imply a precarious depth to the page. The illustration occupies the bulk of the poster's available space, bleeding into the fuzzy frame that contains the exhibition details. The shaggy, stencilled, and drop shadowed type is set horizontally and vertically and cages the illustrated figure. The resulting composition appears both awkwardly fluid and uncomfortably constrained. The one color print process was undoubtedly chosen to reduce printing costs, but the selected dark red ink and yellow paper evoke blood and phlegm, imbuing the poster with a gory corporeality. In this poster, the Hairy Who artists move beyond their previously static interpretation of the

exquisite corpse and develop a visceral, almost viscous composition that contradicts rational interpretations of space and scale. The various ephemera designed for the Hairy Who II show toy with same compositional instability and schmaltzy melodrama as the exhibition's poster. The group titled the companion piece to their second exhibition The Hairy Who Sideshow (Fig. 8). The Sideshow is clearly an extension of the compositional elements introduced in the Hairy Who II poster. The yellow paper, one-color print, exquisite corpse illustration, and eclectic typography echo the same visual discomfort as the poster.

In the catalogue cover, neither the type nor the illustration push the page margins as forcefully as they do in the poster. The typography is also positioned more dominantly in the composition's hierarchy, introducing exaggerated letterforms that monopolize the page. The

Fig 7.
Poster
for the
Hairy
Who II
exhibition.
1967.

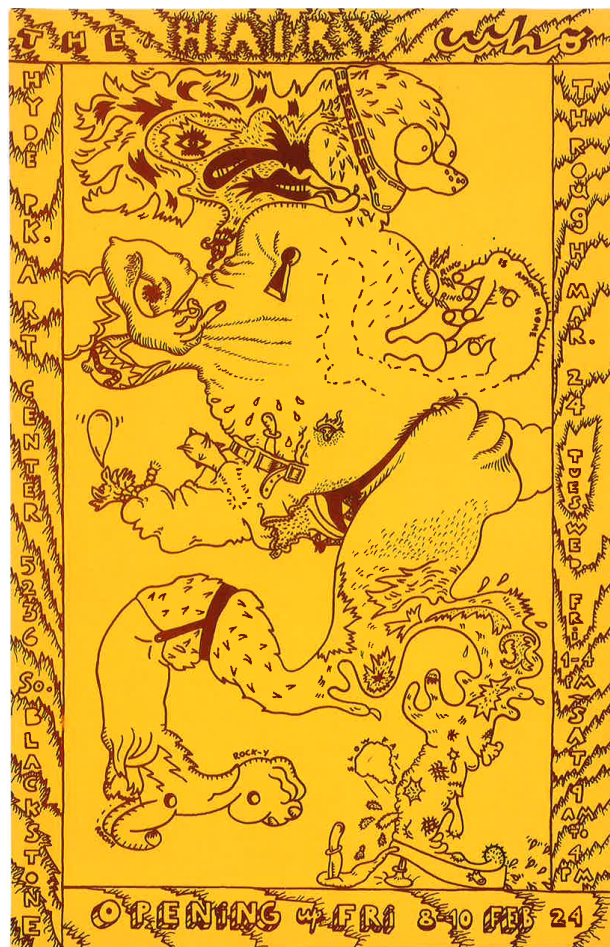


Fig 9.
Front
cover
for the
Hairy
Who
Sideshow



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Fig 10.
Joke
napkins
created
for the
Hairy
Who II
exhibition
opening



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Hairy Who also created branded lapel pins for attendees to wear at the exhibition opening. The work of each individual artist is more immediately recognizable on the pins than in the poster or the catalogue covers, extending the collective visual brand into three dimensional space. The pins physically manifest

the tactile compositional elements employed in the poster and catalogue.

The Hairy Who honed their extensive use of wordplay and verbal trickery in the branded accessories for the Hairy Who II exhibition. The group, with help from HPAC curator Don Baum, created joke napkins reading "Knock Knock Who's There? HAIRY....

Hairy Who II" (Fig. 10).¹⁹ Phrased in this way, the group's moniker echoes the Abbot and Costello bit "Who's on First?", forcing those who utter the name

to appear as if they're evading the question altogether. The Hairy Who's deliberate syntactic obfuscation captivated their exhibition attendees and differentiated the group from other young artists. The turbulent, scatological, and comic materials that the Hairy Who designed to advertise their second exhibition convey the group's embrace of their own marginality.



KNOCK KNOCK

WHO'S

HAIRY THERE?

HAIRY WHO?

With their third and final show at HPAC in 1968, the Hairy Who began exploring new sources of visual allusion and engaging with more sophisticated compositional approaches in their design. By 1968, the Hairy Who had established a recognizable visual identity for themselves grounded in absurd figurism and atypical typography. Pivoting away from the exquisite corpse motifs in their earlier promotional materials, individual members of the Hairy Who designed the poster and catalogue covers for the Hairy Who III exhibition, thus elevating and expanding the brand's visual vernacular. The Hairy Who also began to draw more explicitly from pop cultural reference imagery sourced from advertizing material.

The poster for the Hairy Who III exhibition exemplifies several shifts in the group's brand strategy (Fig. 11). Jim Nutt conceived of and designed the Hairy Who III poster independently. Like the group's previous

posters, Nutt focused his composition on a central human figure and continued to push its typographic elements to an increasingly illustrative extreme.

In contrast to the abstracted, grotesque figural representations present in the group's earlier design work, Nutt opted for a stylized but definitively recognizable illustration of a woman. Nutt continued to use solid dark outlines but also introduced halftone dots, allowing for a more subtle spacial awareness and a clearer sense of depth. Rather than space, scale is the most salient compositional element in the Hairy Who III poster. The central female figure spills off the page and dwarfs much of the type and the secondary illustration in the poster's bottom left hand corner. The incongruous changes in scale are jarring; viewers are left to wonder if they're observing a colossal female figure or if she's reasonably sized while the rest of the poster is comparatively

Fig 11.
Jim Nutt,
Now!
Hairy Who
Makes
You Smell
Good,
Poster for
Hairy
Who III,
1968



miniscule. Evolving from the protuberant nature of the Hairy Who's earlier designed material, Nutt refined a sensuous treatment of shape in his composition. The hand drawn type inundates the poster's remaining white space, contributing to the composition's sense of visual urgency. Nutt refines the elusive spatial

conundrums, bizarre anatomies, reverberating colors, and compositional incongruities inherent to the Hairy Who's visual identity and brand mythology.

When the Hairy Who's final exhibition at HPAC closed in 1968, the group had risen through the ranks to become a local Chicago art legend. Between 1968 and 1969, The collective sought recognition outside of Chicago, first in a May 1968 exhibition in San Francisco, then in a New York show in 1969, and

finally in Washington, D.C. for the their final exhibition together also in 1969. The materials produced for the Hairy Who's San Francisco, New York, and D.C. shows in conjunction with these exhibitions' varying levels of success, illustrate how the group's collective brand became intractably linked to the production of their work and its commercial value.

As previously demonstrated, the Hairy Who's three wildly successful shows at HPAC were generative and had grown increasingly specific and complex with each passing year. Baum had encouraged the Hairy Who's intimate involvement in the production of their exhibitions, leaving space for the group to hone their collective visual identity. In just three years, the Hairy Who had designed a brand that was so evocative that their ephemera had become fetishized collector's items.²⁰ Removed from Baum's creative coddling, the final Hairy Who exhibitions

tested the strength of the group's brand and the limits of its reach.

The Hairy Who's fourth show took place at the Diego Rivera Gallery at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) and was curated by the gallery's director of exhibitions Philip Linhares.²¹ The show received a tepid welcome; the work was a sensation among SFAI's students, but faculty derided it as destructive and undisciplined.²² The Hairy Who weren't strangers to mixed reviews, but the home court advantage they had enjoyed in Chicago had categorically vanished.

The physical and creative distance between the Hairy Who and the SFAI show is reflected in the exhibition's promotional poster (Fig. 12). As with the Hairy Who III exhibition, Nutt designed the SFAI poster single-handedly. Largely adhering to the visual vernacular that the group had established in Chicago, the poster draws on obvious Hairy Who motifs but it neglects the evocative elements of visual storytelling present in the HPAC posters. The SFAI poster centers on a pair of figures pictured from the shoulders up. The grotesque almost macabre man and woman seem to melt into each other but they rest dubiously

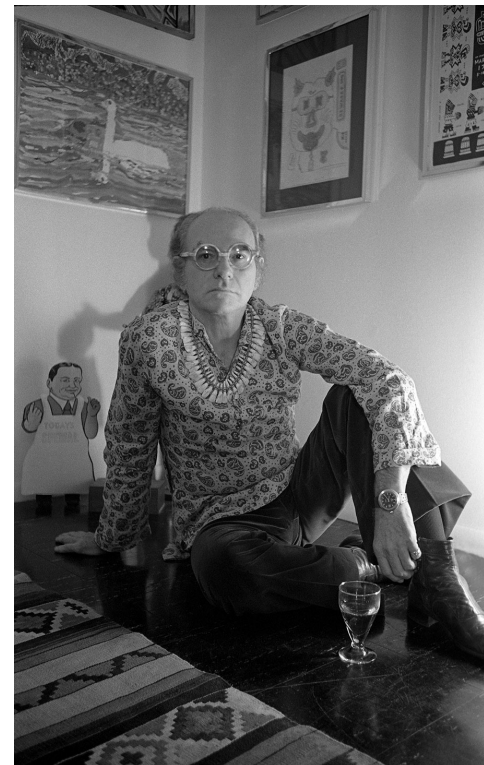
on the page, neither in the foreground nor the background. Compositionally, the poster is less sophisticated than Nutt's poster for Hairy Who III. The only elements that provide a sense of scale are the floating hand in the bottom



Fig 12.
Jim Nutt,
Poster
for Hairy
Who
at the
SFAI,
1968

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left corner and the dismembered fingers above the woman's head. Unlike the poster for Hairy Who III, the radical scale changes seem incredulous rather than curious. The hand drawn



**Don
Baum
in his
home,
1972**

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type appears similar in style to the previous Hairy Who posters. However, the type does not dynamically push at the page edges nor does it lie comfortably in the white space. Instead the type floats awkwardly around the two figures.

Fundamentally, the dearth of a central visual narrative for the poster undermines the sensitive treatment of form and type seen in the previous Hairy Who exhibition posters. Without a unifying narrative the poster reads as vulgar instead of snarky, creepy instead of quirky. As geographic distance forced the Hairy Who to remove themselves from the intricacies of their exhibitions, the purpose of their

brand and its audience was inevitably called into question. The SFAI poster reflects the that the potency of the Hairy Who's visual language derives from the value of the group's metaphorical "hand" in crafting their exhibitions.

Without a Baum, the group was forced to step back from the execution of their

exhibition. The group's iron grip on their visual identity evaporated, testing how their brand would translate in a less controlled and immersive environment. In the end, it appears that the Hairy Who's brand was as much on display at SFAI as was the art itself. A review of the exhibition in the San Francisco Chronicle seems more concerned with the drama of the group's appearance than with the spectacle of the art on the walls. In the Chronicle's serial arts and society column aptly titled Who's Who, critic Frances Moffat waxed poetic about the accoutrement that the Hairy Who donned for their exhibition opening:

"Three of the 'Hairy Who' group of young Pop artists from Chicago were at the opening. They were James Nutt, wearing an outsize trench coat, his wife, Gladys Nilsson, and Karl Wirsum, who wore white mechanic's overalls with red collar and cuffs."²³

Moffat's review focuses on the Hairy Who's style and ethos. Contrasting the group's appearance with that of the "ladies from the straight world" wearing stuffy furs to the SFAI opening, Moffat illustrates how the group embodied their audacity; the group's performance had become

part of the value of their art. Moffat also defines the Hairy Who as Pop artists, an association that the group never claimed. Likely attempting to differentiate the Hairy Who from California's own counter cultural Funk artists, Moffat's casual Pop categorization indicates that the nuances of the Hairy Who's self expression and identity creation were lost on SFAI's West Coast audience. The lack of opportunity for branded material at the SFAI show compared to the HPAC exhibitions compelled the Hairy Who to rely on their reputation without expanding upon their brand voice. The consequences of the Hairy Who's empty national identity would follow the group to New York a year later.

In the Winter of 1969, the Hairy Who's fifth show was held at the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in New York. The SVA's founding director Shirley Glaser organized the two part exhibition on the Hairy Who and California Funk, which Glaser implicitly positioned as the Hairy Who's sculptural counterpart. For the first time, the Hairy Who artists were completely removed from the creative process of their exhibition. Milton Glaser designed the poster for the SFAI show without input from the contributing artists (Fig. 13).

The poster is formally quite sophisticated; the type is well placed and mindful of the paragraphs' rags and optical alignment while the large numbers playfully illustrate light and shadow.

Glaser's design of the SVA exhibition poster ignores

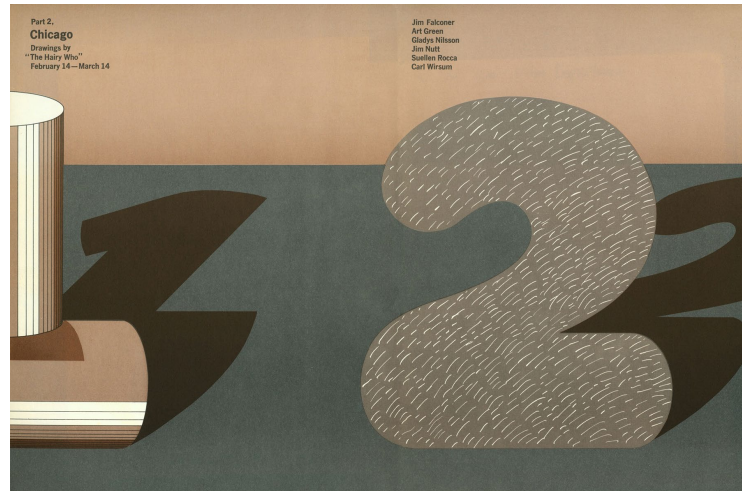


Fig 13.
Milton
Glaser
Poster
for
Part 2.
Chicago:
Drawings
by "The
Hairy Who"
1969

the Hairy Who's extant visual identity. Aside from the white hairs sketched on the number 2, the figural illustration, bold strokes, and graphic typography that characterized the design of the Hairy Who are almost willfully ignored. Because Glaser's portfolio of work at the time included many provocative applications of illustration and typography (Fig. 14) his bordering on Modernist design for the SVA's Hairy Who poster is particularly curious. Evidently Glaser (or possibly both Glasers) wanted to separate the Hairy Who's art from

their articulated brand. The SVA exhibition's limited critical success illustrates that Hairy Who had crafted a commercial identity that relied almost entirely on their visual brand and designed material. As the group progressed toward their last



Fig 14.
Milton
Glaser
Poster for
Dylan's
Greatest
Hits
1969

exhibition together, they distilled and elaborated their brand identity.

The Hairy Who's final exhibition was held at the Corcoran Gallery in the Spring of 1969. The introduction to the exhibition's catalogue (or as the Hairy Who spell it "cat-a-log") epitomizes the group's strategic use of branded language and clarifies the goals of their

creative collaboration. The catalogue's introduction begins with Jim Nutt questioning the publication's usefulness "Now you're starting to stand between us and the public," introduces four of the six artists by their Zodiac signs,

chronicles a 1954 Cubs game at which all six artists were coincidentally in attendance, offers Gladys Nilsson's opinion of art critics "Only if they're tall, dark and handsome and a little on the thin side," and finally signs off "Against drugs; for wrestling magazines."²⁴ This rambling parody of an catalogue introduction serves as the Hairy Who's closing statement of purpose.

Green, Falconer, Nilsson, Nutt, Rocca, and Wirsum, proclaim themselves the Hairy Who one final time. After cutting through the introduction's abrasive and endearingly youthful snark, the artists reiterate their Hairy Who mythology, attributing an almost spiritual significance to their simultaneous presence at the 1954 opening Cubs game. The artists

are also obtusely insurgent, blasting art critics, catalogues, and collectors with little restraint. In their final statement to the public, the group's "brand" snaps fully into focus.

The Hairy Who discovered a way to harness their "style" and translate it into a marketable "brand." Each artist's practice migrated from an act of pure self expression to the creation (or even curation) of visual products produced for a specific audience and manufactured to be bought, traded, and sold. The artists may have occasionally functioned as designers, but more importantly The Hairy Who was an explicitly designed project. Seen in this context, the Hairy Who interrogates the fragile boundaries separating art from design.

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