STUDIO FEIXEN

posters
pizzeria

precision
provoking

FELIX PFÄFFLI

Originally started Feixen in 2009. Teacher at Fachklasse Grafik Luzern. Youngest member in the history of AGI. Gave lectures, organised exhibitions, workshops and won prizes worldwide. Responsible for the necessary chaos in our designs.

RAPHAEL LEUTENEGGER

Finished his training as a technical draftsman in an architectural office. Studied graphic design and started working independently straight after. Gained experience while living in Japan for half a year. Uses his skills and knowledge to build his own furniture in his spare time.

Interview with Studio Founder Felix Pfäffli by Afsaneh Angelina Rafii

You are active in your studio with both commissioned and personal projects and also teach. One of the things you teach is narrative design, what is behind that ?

We have a rule where we try to work on our personal projects. Actually, a lot of stuff started there, like the pizzeria. Of course, it is difficult, and you have to be strict and say that as a studio you also want to invest in your personal projects. We believe that this, in the end, pays off. That's where our idea of the Lab comes in. We have many concepts we want to work on, like a book, a clothing line, and the pizzeria.

Why are you interested in creating a clothing collection ?

Because we have worked with many designers in the past and were never really happy, either the production changed, or in the end the fabric was different… so it never indeed resulted in what we had conceived. Now, we have started working with a tailor.

Are you happy with your pizzaiolo ?

Yes, very happy. He is amazing. Every week we go and eat there.

What's behind narrative design ?

I used to teach that, but I don't anymore. I think what's much more important is generated design.

Which is what ?

It's a lot about design just happening. It's just happening in front of you, and maybe you don't even understand why it is happening. I try to teach students a way of designing that is more rule-based and less based on specific design decisions.

What's the difference between rules and design decisions?

You can think about a big thing, where you just make rules, like for example: "I will design with lines." but then I can turn them around, I can make them as long as I want and I can colour them. So, you just look at what you can do with this rule and how far you can go.

Would design decisions, on the other hand, emanate from the client?

Design decisions could, for example, make you really focus on the details, specific for this one application. So I try to move away from this one perfect moment in my teaching. Because, nowadays we don't have to design just one application but, sometimes, one hundred applications. This makes your design decisions utterly different because they have to work for a range of applications.

The teaching is really about giving students the right mindset, to make them lose the fear of doing something. Often it's also group work, so they just design and don't think about themselves too much, they don't question themselves because it is more abstract.

Do you enjoy teaching?

Very much. It's not that much about design in the end. They are really young, like 16 years old.

You were around the same age when you designed posters for the "Treibhaus", a concert house in Lucerne.

I was lucky. My father was already a graphic designer and a teacher. There was this cultural place when I was in high school, and their concept was that their audience made their designs, and the audience happened to be high school students.

At the studio you work with Raphael Leutenegger and Alice Poma, what unique talents does each of you bring to the table?

We are really different, and that's a good thing. Raphael has a background in construction drawing and then moved into graphic design, while Alice is a trained architect who became super interested in typography. When it comes to the work, Alice focuses on the layout, the details, the typography with much precision. I work on straightforward and easy ideas, the bigger structure and Raphael makes it happen.

We have entirely different characters, which are complementary but we all want the same quality.

A lot of your work is around posters, can you think of a few examples of poster art that you found powerful in the past?

Growing up I liked Martin Woodtli who was a teacher of mine and whom I am now fortunate to teach with. Niklaus Troxler, Erich Brechbühl.

What is it about the Swiss graphic design scene?

It's super cute, and actually, in Lucerne we have a graphic design scene, where we try to get together and share our work and have a few drinks together. Erich Brechbühl organises this, and he is, in fact, the guy who held this cultural place in high-school, I was referring to.

Today, I think there is this Russian graphic designer who does amazing work, and her name is Anna Kulacheck.

Let's talk about your three layers of research when you work on a poster.

When I was designing posters for Südpol, it was quite a large body of work.

ICON DESIGN MAGAZINE

The Icon Design Magazine invited us to design the cover for their special issue about the 100 upcoming design talents of 2017. We ended up designing some placeholder design objects and had fun figuring out how to put all these names into boxes.

VLOW!

Vlow! is a festival in the space between communication, design and architecture. It's an international platform for education, encounter and networking. It deals with communication strategies in space and innovative work and cooperation processes. Participants are graphic designers and architects, scenographers, photographers, audio or video designers and managers from the areas of branding, marketing and advertising.

Ten minutes after Hans-Joachim Gögl, the director of the festival, entered our studio it was clear that we would work together. We liked his ambition to create a festival that breaks boundaries – a festival in which the speakers work together with the audience. Just a few weeks later we visited Hans Joachim Gögel in Bregenz. During a three-day workshop we closely collaborated with the curator and elaborated a visual presentation for the festival. The only design requirement we needed to meet was that the design language should inevitably follow the previous years. In line with the name Vlow! we decided on a concept that is in continuous motion: we designed an animated poster, a modular poster system that can be hung as a rapport, and lastly, an animation that's displayed across the facade of the nearby Casino Bregenz.

5. MARKUS HANZER
VON DER PROBLEMSTELLUNG ZUR AUFGABENDEFINITION

6. BORIS MARTE
THOUGHTS MEET SPACE

7. BÜRO FÜR REISEN
BRIEFING VERTIEFUNG

8. MICHAEL PÖSCH
STELL DIR VOR, ES GIBT EINE MARKE, UND KEINER MACHT MIT

9. TOM RITSCHEL
«Die Neugier steht immer an erster Stelle eines Problems, das gelöst werden will»

10. CHRISTINE KAPPEI
DER FLUCH DER ERSTEN ZAHL

19.30 VLOWNIGHT

9.00 THOMAS HUNDT — HORROR VACUI

9.45 VLOWWERKSTATT — TEILNEHMER WERDEN ZU TEILGEBERN!

10.45 Pause
11.00 Vlow!Werkstatt
12.45 Mittagessen

Bjarke Ingels 11.45

Das war bei weitem die beste Konferenz, die ich je besucht habe und das in allen Kategorien. Wenn im Bereich der grenzüberschreitenden Zwischenräume etwas vorne ist, dann wohl euer erlesenes Zusammentreffen in diesem traumhaften Haus am See. Sehr tolles Auditorium. Großes Niveau! Schönes Ambiente.

Toller Moderator, super Organisation, feinstes Essen.
Ein super spannendes Format, das seinesgleichen sucht! Euer präzises Denken und Savoir-vivre ist nicht zu übertreffen!
Ich habe selten zwei so interessante, inspirierende Tage erlebt und in so kurzer Zeit mehr spannende Menschen kennengelernt.

OTO NOVÉ SWISS

Oto Nové Swiss is a three-day festival at London's Cafe Oto. We were asked to design whatever we think suits this event. Since this festival is organised by Swiss cultural institutes but happens in London we thought it doesn't make sense to advertise it in the streets of London but in the only place we all share. So we decided to design an interactive poster which you can explore, play around with and maybe even compose your own music. Visit otonoveswiss.co.uk to get the full experience.
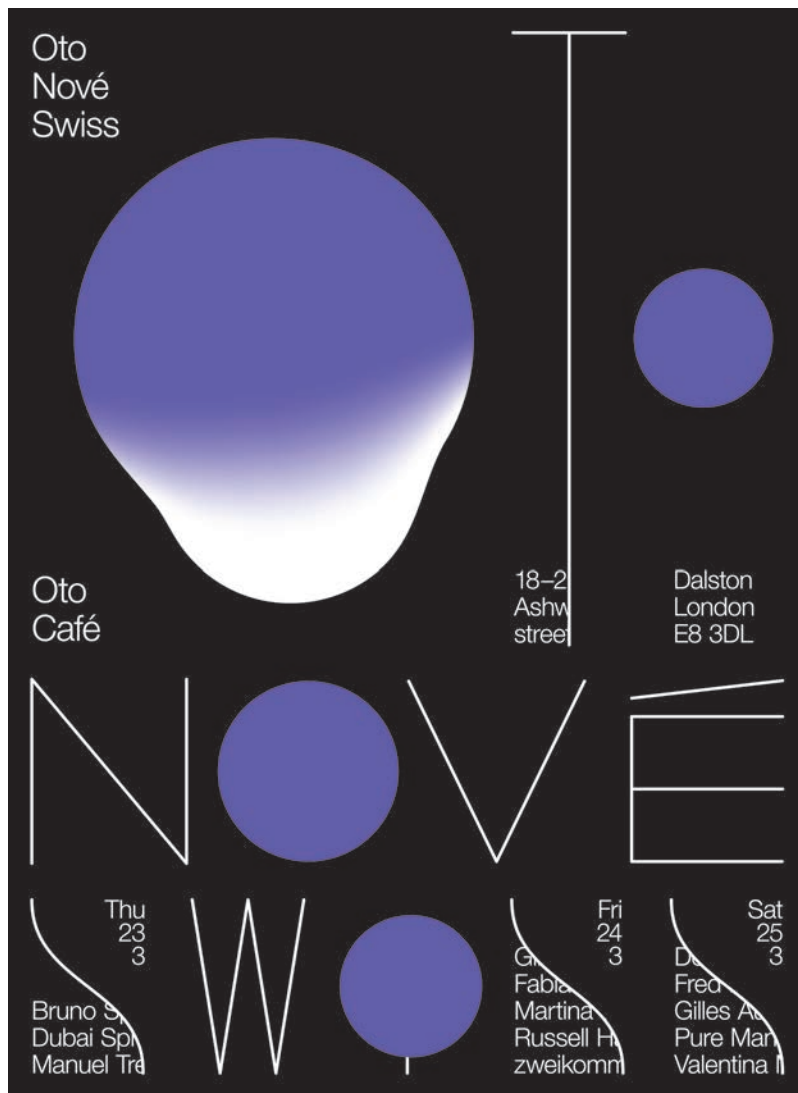
Over a period of three years, I designed more than one hundred posters. So, you can imagine it was a lot. It was about three posters a month. Also, there was no corporate design, so every poster had to be different. I had to design them really quickly because I also had other projects going on at the same time. I realised that I needed a sort of set-up that would allow me to make decisions more efficiently. In the beginning, it would stress me out, because I am connected to my work, so I would have a hard time bringing it to an end and say "Ok, this is good now."

That's why I tried to determine for myself what I consider good and what I consider bad. With every poster, I would make similar research on three levels.

The first level was objective research, so for example in the case of a band I would find out who they are, try to find commonalities, like if all the band members wore glasses… this could be interesting.

The second level was subjective research, where I would try and listen to the music. I would close my eyes and try to see if I can see some colours, patterns, etc.

The last layer was about doing graphic design research, like how can you make posters loud or silent or strong.

In the end, there was one idea that stood out.

It's where the work is objectively correct, subjectively it feels right and is graphically surprising. This became my system from then on.

What if you don't like the music?

It can happen of course, and I think the work suffers as a result, but I would then try and focus on what makes them unique and zoom in on that.

When we last spoke you talked about how you like work to be loud or at least surprising, do you think that colour is the best way to achieve that?

Colour for me is feeling. If I want something to be a little cold I would do that with the colour scheme. The surprise element is on a different level. It is mostly a concept or the technique itself. Sometimes it is humour or other times it is how something is made, other times it is animation itself. This is always different because it is the surprise level.

It's also what we spend the most time thinking about. What could we do next? What hasn't been done before?

How important is typography?

Very important. It's funny because when I started this was the most challenging thing for me. I see that with my students also, people who are good with design are mostly good at making up pictures. You tell them to make a poster for a band, and what they come up with are these beautiful pictures, but they are not yet able to communicate. Their mind is made to design, but typography is communication. It's kind of much more abstract. So, in the beginning, you have to learn that typography can also be a picture. You have to learn to translate that, that you can use a letter or a word, not just to be a word but also to be part of the picture, and then when you can manage that, you can do so many things at the same time.

Now, for me, it has become one of the most natural things. I look at letters, and I already see twenty possibilities on how to set them on a surface. I also immediately see them animated, in different shapes, etc.

Is there an ideal interplay between colour and typography in your opinion?

Yes, and also image. That's the magic behind it. You have to do everything at the same time and not run on one line too quickly and miss the other opportunities. Otherwise, you will always end up with kind of a compromise.

You like learning new skills, what discoveries are you focusing on at the moment?

We learn new things all the time actually, with every project. It's not about the big things. This week I was working on a small problem for three days, and I tried every possible technique to find which is the best, and it was a problem that nobody would care about. In the end, you always find the solution. We are maniacs, a bit. For me that's the most prominent luxury actually, being able to take the time to find the best solution. I value that much more than speed. This also means that you have to work on yourself a lot, and sometimes it requires redoing something from the beginning to be able to do it with the optimal level of precision.

However, you also like to move on…

Yes. We are good decision-makers at the studio. We don't struggle to make decisions, and we also don't care if it is not the best decision in the end. One rule we have is that we never go back. As soon as we decide on something, we only work on making this possible. So, our progress can be fast, but the application has to be perfect and well-done.

Your studio is based in Lucerne, how did you first contact happen with big international brands like Google, Nike, Wired, etc.?

It just happened. I don't really know, the why, but it's the magic of the Internet. Now, I know how it happens, we have a big audience, we reach about a million people in one day, whenever we publish something, which is crazy. But in the beginning, I am not sure how it happened.

It's a great situation to be in, not to have to move to cities like NYC or London, for example, that have a certain reputation and being able to stay in your home-base.

Yes, but it also very much depends on the kind of work that you are doing. With our Swiss clients, we work on projects where we have to meet once a week, whereas with our international clients we work a lot on concepts or moods, which means we don't have to see them that often.

What do you think is essential in creating a visual language for a client?

I think that's ultimately our job. When I was talking about typography, today, what you create is a voice. Whatever project you are working on, you are essentially creating an imaginary person that is talking to you with a specific voice, with particular words, with a specific colour. Our job is creating this person. It's a whole identity that you create. So, the letters I understand as a voice with a temperature, with a strength, with a character. This all has to fit the content.

If you apply that to the fact that you have cultural clients and also work on projects in the realm of advertising, what do you think these two worlds can learn from each other? And do you try to apply the lessons you learned in one arena to the other?

We are somewhere in between, and we have consciously chosen this positioning. Some people choose one over the other. We find both very interesting.
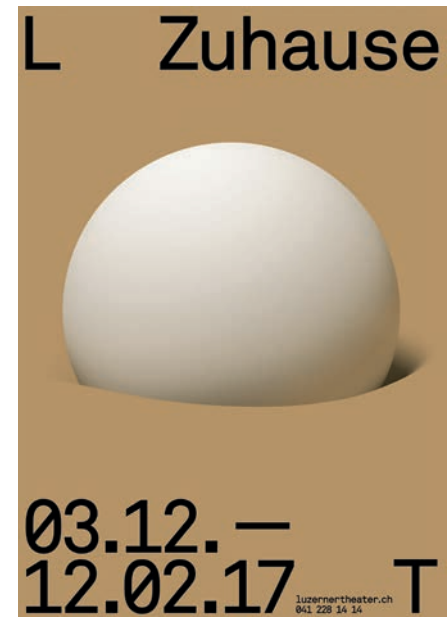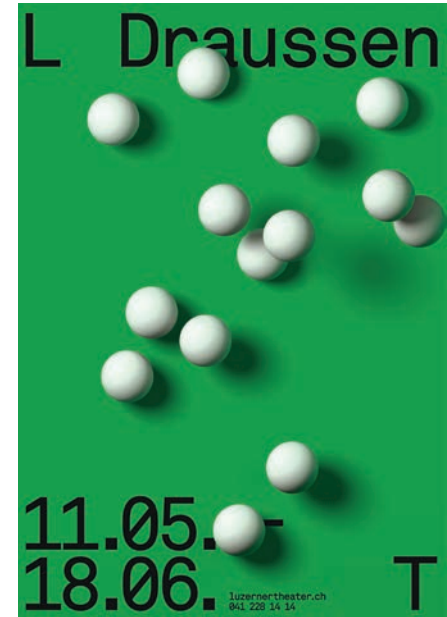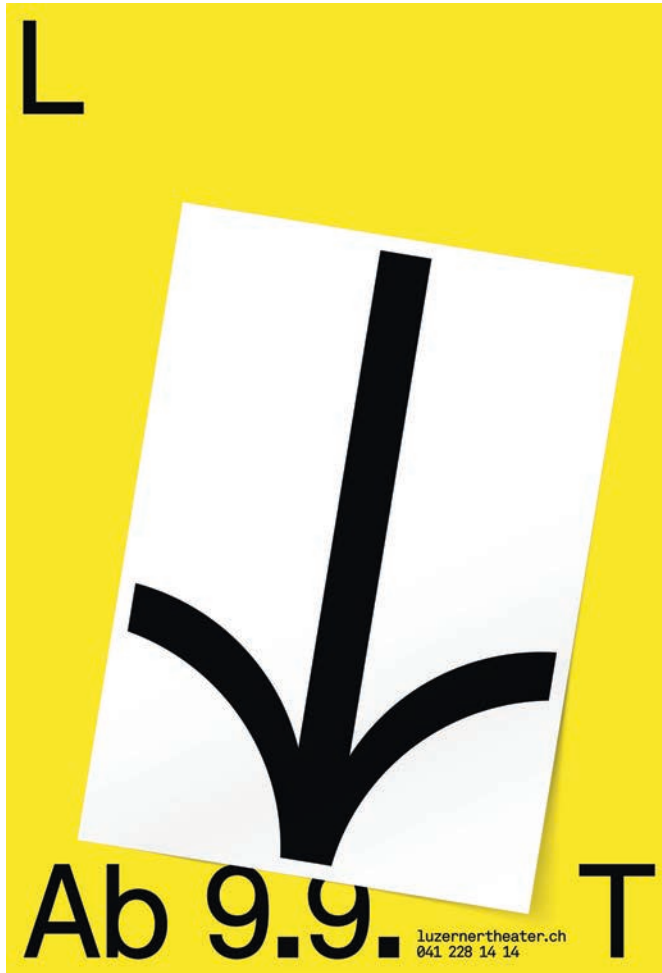
SALZHAUS

The Salzhaus is a concert hall in Winterthur. The club was founded in 1996. When in Winterthur the Salzhaus, Gaswerk and Kraftfeld opened three concert venues were founded in one year.
Every month the Salzhaus invites another artist to design their monthly poster. This was our contribution.
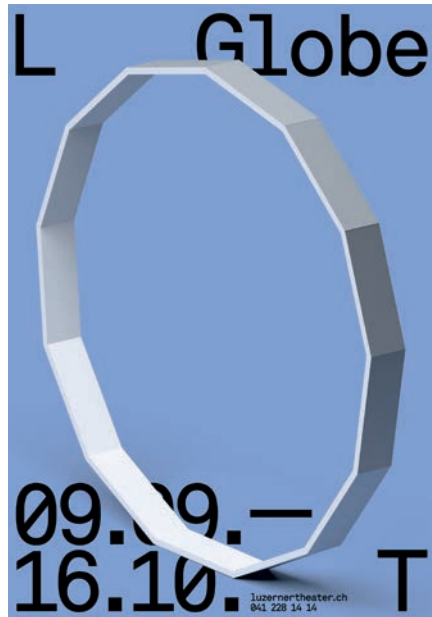
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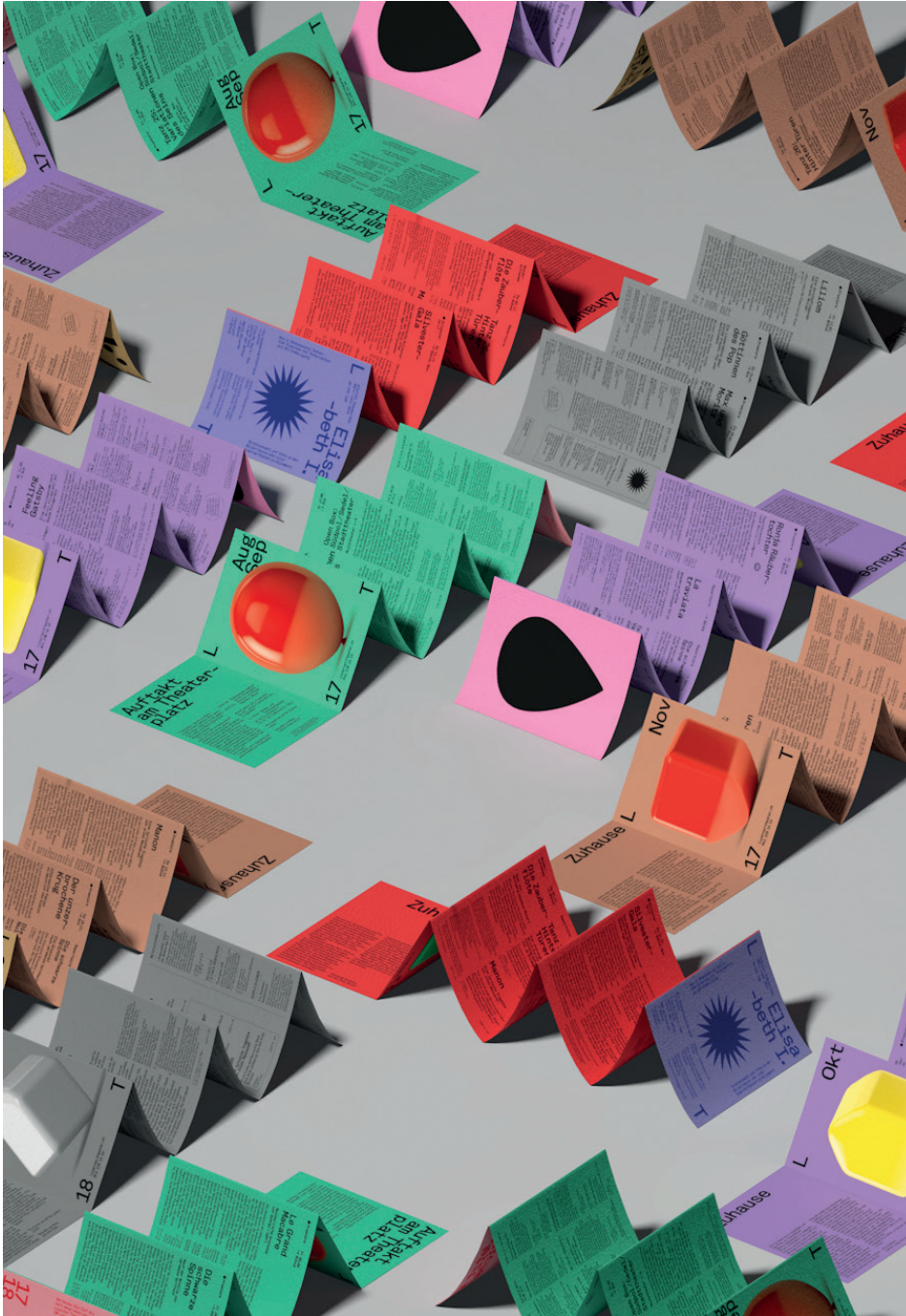12.02.17 luzernertheater.ch
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LUZERNER THEATER

The Luzerner Theater is the only theatre in Central Switzerland, which presents three different sectors of the performing arts (opera, plays and dance).

Through intensive discussions and close co-operation with the director and his team we created a visual language, which is greatly reduced, yet playful. It provides endless possibilities for the theatre to convey its contents.

We were committed to the overall art direction of the building. Consequently – despite the immense scope of design applications – it was especially important to us that everything came from a single source. Over the last year we turned the house upside down creatively. We rethought and reorganised everything: from furniture to poster systems, trailers, publications, letters, books, flyers, stickers, signaling, photographic language, website and umbrellas… even the ticket was redesigned.

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02.12. T
luzernertheater.ch
041 228 14 14

L Globe
09.09.—
16.10. T
luzernertheater.ch
041 228 14 14

L Globe
09
16.10. T
luzernertheater.ch
041 228 14 14

L Bühne
Kirche
02.04.—
28.04. T
luzernertheater.ch
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Cultural places could think a little bit more about the audience and at the same time advertisement could think more about quality. Of course, they could learn from each other.

It's kind of ironic that you say that.

Why ?

Because by definition a cultural place is talking to an audience and advertising is promoting a product, so they should think about quality.

Yes, it's crazy but that's not what they do. That's the problem. In a cultural place, they think too much about themselves and their identity and they want to represent exactly themselves and they don't think about the fact that the audience they want to reach is maybe not on their level yet. And then you have to adopt a voice that is explaining things, but they never want to explain. Because that's more like advertising. Advertisement means thinking about the audience and just triggering them. Cultural design means more identity work. The best solution is to have both at the same time.

You exchange ideas at the studio and come to a common agreement about what works best, but how do you decide on processes when initiating your reflections on the project at hand ?

Often it is clear from the start. It's not a big thing. Everybody tries something out and then you put stuff together and see what works. But today it is often more fluid, it can constantly shift.

Maybe it starts with a big idea, and then you continue to work on it and are more and more precise. It's many discussions also. It's a lot about dialogue.

If we ever have an issue, we later realize that it was because we were not talking enough. It's essential.

Let's say each of us is on a bicycle and we are biking together. Let's say Raphael is the fastest one, he approaches a traffic light, and it turns to orange, he thinks he can make it so he rides as fast as he can. Then, maybe Alice and I are stuck behind and think WTF he just drove through, and we can't make it. Then we have to wait until it's green again and follow him.

This is a little bit the situation when you design by yourself for too long, and you don't show the work. You make a lot of progress, and you are faster, but the others have no chance of catching up to your speed. So, it makes no sense to make progress by yourself in a group. You always have to think : are the others still with me ? This is the most important thing that we learned, that we cannot move too fast individually and we have to communicate.

You always have to think, would it be a problem now, if someone came and said I don't like this work, because if you work too long for yourself it can become a problem.

What have you discovered in the realm of animated typography in recent times, as I believe that's a domain that interests you.

We are working on a project right now with Grilli Type, the Swiss-type foundry. The project will be entirely about animated typography.

What's next for Studio Feixen ?

That's our problem at the moment. We have so many things we want to do. We are thinking about growing, about moving our studio, how to continue with the lab, about opening another restaurant …
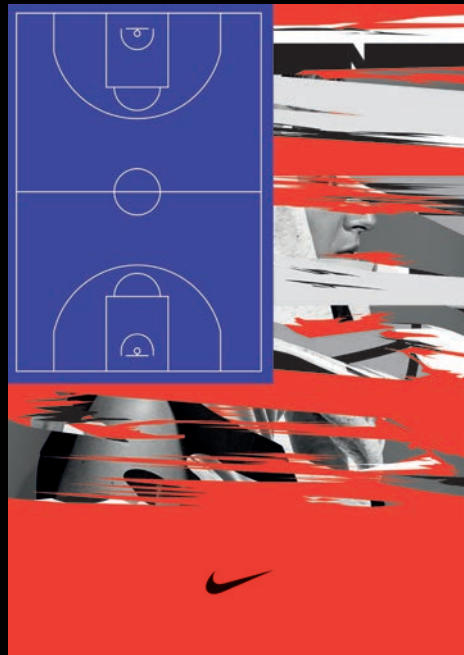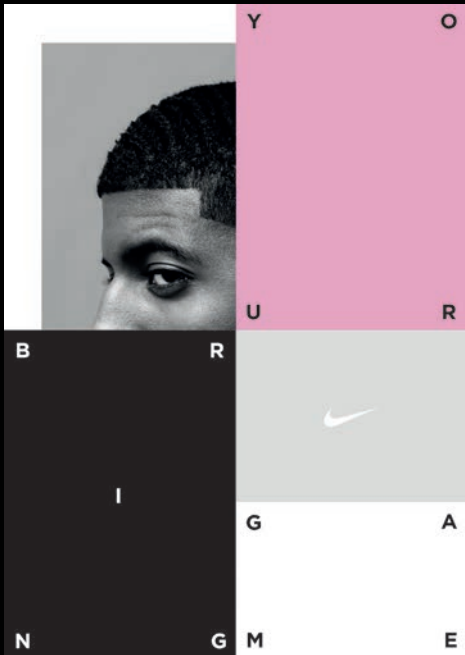
NIKE

Work with Nike is a highly professional "ping-pong" process. Nike provides us with an emotion to be expressed and leaves it to us to find out how this emotion manifests itself visually. This allows us to explore and focus at our own will, without worrying about a greater concept. For this reason we find working with Nike to be extremely refreshing and enjoyable.

Over the last two years, we had the pleasure to work for Nike Basketball on a variety of projects. We designed t-shirts for world stars such as Lebron James or Kevin Durant and created posters and typography concepts for Hyperdunk as well as the Bring your Game campaign.

Our aim for this campaign was to create design that conveyed the right feeling. We played and messed around, we collaged, we cut and glued. It wasn't about big concepts – It was about uncovering a visual language that sported the same energy and excitement as a great basketball game.

The Air Max Day (next double page) could be regarded as the kid's birthday party (Yes, seriously!) of the Nike Air Max series. It takes place annually in multiple cities across the entire world. This year we collaborated on different concepts in the early stages of development. Amongst others, we experimented with typographic systems that disregarded the laws of gravity.

OF

IDEAS

NIKE

30 YEARS OF NIKE DREAMS
SHOE
IT'S
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MAX IS
NIKE AIR

IT'S A WINDOW TO WHAT'S NEXT
NIKE

WIN TO WIN TO NE X
NIKE

IT'S A WINDOW TO WHAT'S NEXT
NIKE

IT'S 30 YEARS OF DREAMS
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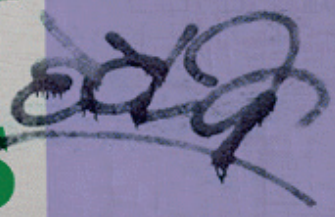
DESIGN   FRIENDS

PUBLICATIONS

01 **CHRISTOPH NIEMANN** Illustration Design 2009
02 **MICHEL MALLARD** Creative Direction 2009
03 **FUN FACTORY** Product Design 2009
04 **ANDREAS UEBELE** Signage Design 2010
05 **HARRI PECCINOTTI** Photography 2010
06 **KUSTAA SAKSI** Illustration Design 2010
07 **5.5 DESIGNERS** Product Design 2011
08 **NIKLAUS TROXLER** Graphic Design 2011
09 **JOACHIM SAUTER** Media Design 2011
10 **MICHAEL JOHNSON** Graphic Design 2011
11 **ELVIS POMPILIO** Fashion Design 2011
12 **STEFAN DIEZ** Industrial Design 2012
13 **CHRISTIAN SCHNEIDER** Sound Design 2012
14 **MARIO LOMBARDO** Editorial Design 2012
15 **SAM HECHT** Industrial Design 2012
16 **SONJA STUMMERER &**
   MARTIN HABLESREITER Food Design 2012
17 **LERNERT & SANDER** Art & Design 2013

18 **MURAT GÜNAK** Automotive Design 2013
19 **NICOLAS BOURQUIN** Editorial Design 2013
20 **SISSEL TOLAAS** Scent Design 2013
21 **CHRISTOPHE PILLET** Product Design 2013
22 **MIRKO BORSCHE** Editorial Design 2014
23 **PAUL PRIESTMAN** Transportation Design 2014
24 **BRUCE DUCKWORTH** Packaging Design 2014
25 **ERIK SPIEKERMANN** Graphic Design 2014
26 **KLAUS-PETER SIEMSSEN** Light Design 2014
27 **EDUARDO AIRES** Corporate Design 2015
28 **PHILIPPE APELOIG** Graphic Design 2015
29 **ALEXANDRA MURRAY-LESLIE**
   High Techne Fashion Design 2015
30 **PLEIX** Video & Installation Design 2016
31 **LA FILLE D'O** Fashion Design 2016
32 **RUEDI BAUR** Graphic Design 2016
33 **ROMAIN URHAUSEN** Product Design 2016
34 **MR BINGO** Illustration Design 2016

35 **KIKI VAN EIJK** Product Design 2016
36 **JEAN-PAUL LESPAGNARD**
   Fashion Design 2017
37 **PE'L SCHLECHTER** Graphic Design 2017
38 **TIM JOHN & MARTIN SCHMITZ**
   Scenography Design 2017
39 **BROSMIND** Illustration Design 2017
40 **ARMANDO MILANI** Graphic Design 2017
41 **LAURA STRAßER** Product Design 2017
42 **PHOENIX DESIGN** Industrial Design 2018
43 **UWE R. BRÜCKNER** Scenography Design 2018
44 **BROUSSE & RUDDIGKEIT** Design Code 2018
45 **ISABELLE CHAPUIS** Photography Design 2018
46 **PATRICIA URQUIOLA** Product Design 2018
47 **SARAH-GRACE MANKARIOUS**
   Art Direction 2018