



THOMAS SCHNEIDER



German graphic designer and collage artist, **Thomas Schneider**, creates amorphous graphic compositions from reclaimed typographic posters. They are meticulously produced and, despite their immediate simplicity, they contain additional levels of intrigue for the viewer.

Hi Thomas, we interviewed you for issue #07 of CC. Magazine - how do you think your collage art has changed or evolved since then?

Fundamentally, my collage art has not changed. I have become more conscious of what I do: on the one hand there are pure forms and there are other compositions where the background also plays an important role in the composition, also becomes a form, so to speak. There is the word in German – 'vexierbild', which means puzzle picture and these compositions interest me because, in addition to the pure form, there is another level of observation.

You work as a graphic designer - how much does that influence your collage work?

That's an ambivalent thing. Working as a freelance graphic designer gives me the freedom to work as an artist. And not to have to use every opportunity

to earn money with my art. I'm happy to be able to immerse myself in the art scene at the level I want to.

It's sometimes very hard to take a step back as an artist when I have to earn money as a graphic designer. Sometimes, I have less time to make collages. Imagine my frustration when I have to design tables on my computer with 6pt fonts and next to me is collage material with 50cm high letters just waiting for me! Sometimes it's hard for me to stand that. My thinking as an artist is influenced by my profession as a graphic designer, in the sense that I want viewers to be able to understand my art, besides the purely aesthetic aspect. There are also collages that are very strongly reminiscent of a logo, a figurative mark, that's also the graphic designer in me coming through.



Above : Collage #098



Your collages feel very deliberate and designed - are they? Or is your process more intuitive?

My collages look consciously designed, but it's always a purely intuitive process. I lay down the material, look at it, and a dialogue with the typography begins. The material speaks to me. It is clear that I will not make flat collages from thin typography. But what form will the material take later? This is a searching intuitive process (I strip the text material of its semantic meaning) that evolves and in the end a form emerges with which I am satisfied and whose elements visually engage with the original clearly identifiable message.

One day a friend looked at my work and said to me that he always sees in my work the search for balance. That's right. I always end up with a balanced composition, (I don't know if I'm supposed to like that). When I have very little material, I'm always afraid that it won't be enough. On the other hand, it's also a special challenge with very little material. Then I sometimes prepare the compositions on the computer or make sketches. But this way of working is also intuitive.

In the beginning, I had reservations about preparing compositions with the help of the computer, but in the end it is so that the composition on the canvas takes on a life of its own at a certain point in time and something completely new and different than originally thought emerges. It's as if the typography has a life of its own and seeks out the later form.

There also seems to be a high level of precision - is that important to you?

Yes, precision is important to me. But this precision is cancelled out when you look at the collages up close. I also find it very exciting when damage is visible. Sometimes I also retouch with a coloured pencil when it seems necessary. But I don't do that very often.

These damages are always part of the material. It's an ambivalence, on the top viewing level, you don't see the origin - the destruction of typography.

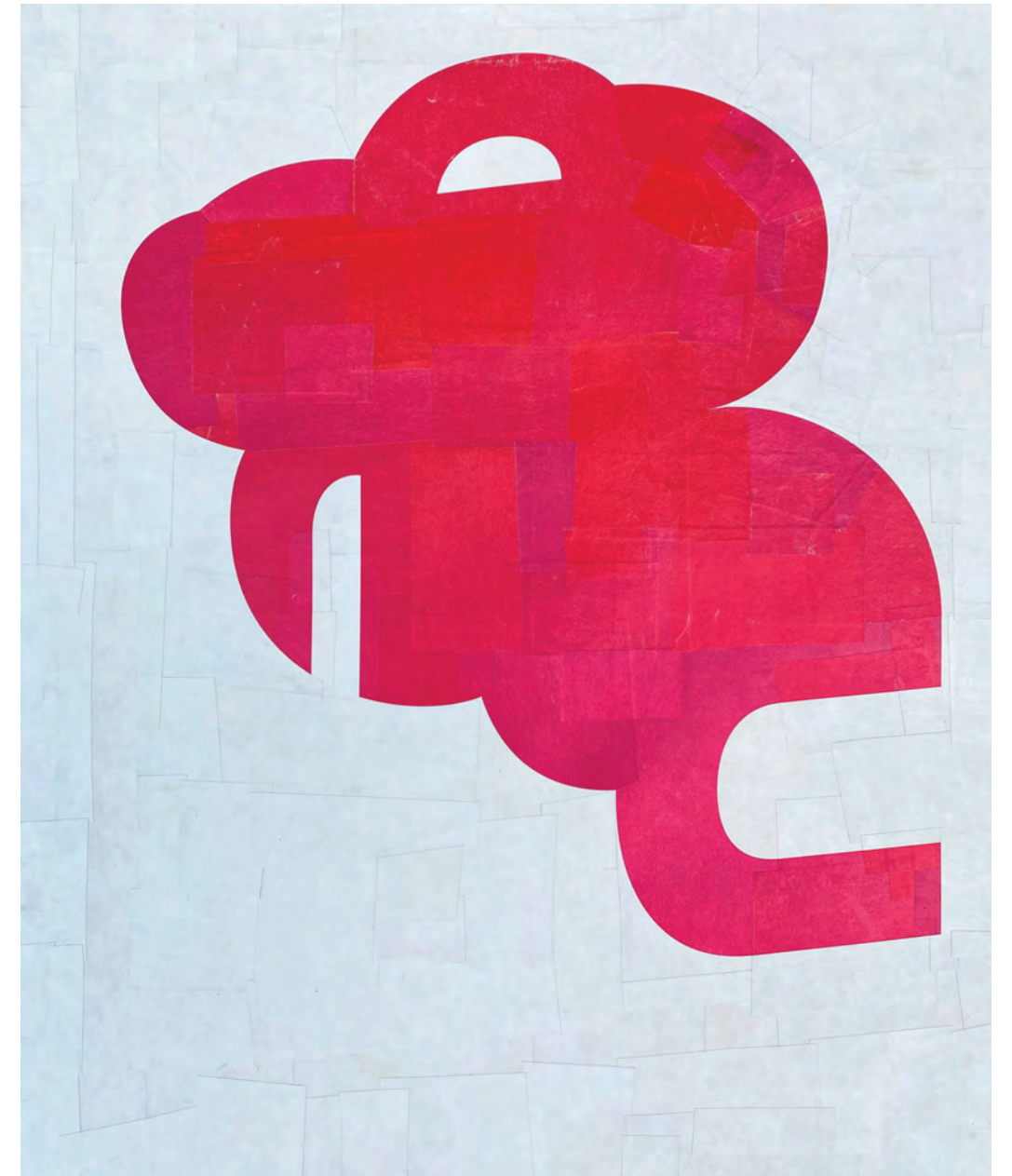
Even if you know that the forms consist of cut letters, you only perceive the graphic form. This contrast - creating a harmonious form through destruction - is an essential part of my work and is what makes it so appealing.

At first glance, the collage seems to be a clean, graphic form. However, you have to look up close to see what it is made of. Then you notice the cut edges and the individual paper scraps - the inner life of the composition. The works contain, so to speak, an invitation to look more closely. In a figurative sense, too, this is perhaps a message to the viewer, not to be satisfied with the first impression, to look more closely in order to understand connections. Perhaps one can say that my collages promote a kind of new consciousness.

Your collages are made up of deconstructed typography - and the images that you create also seem to have a semiotic feel to them - are you creating a new, visual language? Or, do you ever, build meaning into the symbols and designs you create?

Yes, indeed, it is a kind of new visual language. Mostly it's also important to me that parts of the typography are recognisable, so that you can guess what this composition is made of. An important aspect is this recognisability of the material. I don't deliberately build in meaning, but sometimes a meaning emerges. I find it exciting that the typography that had a meaning and information before, is still there but now has another meaning, a purely artistic one. You can say that the forms and compositions contain a kind of abstract information.

“
At first glance, the collage seems to be a clean, graphic form. However, you have to look up close to see what it is made of. Then you notice the cut edges and the individual paper scraps – the inner life of the composition.





You've been working on a consistent approach for a while now - how far do you think you can push it? Are you looking to take the work in a certain direction?

I don't know in which direction my work will go in the future. I think there is still a lot to try out. The exciting thing about artistic work is NOT to be satisfied, only in this way can you come to new insights and results.

There is a quote by David Bowie that I like very much, *"If you feel safe in the area that you're working in, you're not working in the right area. Always go a little further into the water than you feel you're capable of being in. Go a little bit out of your depth and when you don't feel that your feet are quite touching the bottom you're just about in the right place to do something exciting."*

On the one hand, I want to move away from pure form and more towards the interplay between background and form. On the other hand, I also like to bring the individual letters even more into the background or to dissolve them completely and to work out a pure shape. A form that from a distance reminds me of a kind of Hard Edge form by Elsworth

Kelly, but on the other hand, on closer inspection, has its own inner life through the many small individual paper scraps. Let's see... It depends on the original material that I have available.

Most of your works are created with a very limited colour palette - does that involve looking for specific types of source material?

No, I don't look for a particular material. I usually find it and then I see what I can make out of it. I let it work and a kind of dialogue begins.

Most of the material is found posters, from which I can make larger collages. Posters are usually limited in their colour palette - because they are also striking and have to work quickly. This inevitably results in a clear visual language that seems familiar and can be quickly grasped - analogous to the original product – the poster. I also work with cheap brochures in smaller formats, if the size of the typography allows it. Most of the time, I work with grotesque fonts. But there are posters with antiqua fonts that I like very much (this spread). Unfortunately, I find them very rarely.



Left top : Collage #106 and source material

This spread, clockwise from top left :
Collage #103 • Collage #121 • Collage #114 • Collage #105



Collage #111

“
My collages look consciously designed, but it's always an intuitive process. I lay down the material, look at it and a dialogue with the typography begins. The material speaks to me.



By deconstructing words and letters and converting them to symbols and shapes, is that about a process of purification or neutralisation - i.e. taking away the literal meaning of the words and converting them to something more abstract and open to interpretation?

It is a process of destruction and the creation of something new. By destroying the letters, a destruction of the content takes place at the same time. I construct something new from the parts. The meaning is contained in the later form, but you can no longer decipher it. Viewers guess the origin because they recognise typography and then understand precisely this process that leads to the form. Most viewers always want to know what the origin of the collage was. That's why I always show the original material on a small sheet in my exhibitions. In the end, I turn concrete advertising messages into abstract signs, non-representational forms. Clear communication becomes an open, ambiguous motif.

The development of writing is also exciting. Our writing today has developed through images, for example, the image of a bull's head first became the alpha, then the lower-case a, as we know it

today. I do it the other way around. I make pictures out of letters. Today, there are also scripts in which the characters of the script are pictures: for example, the Chinese and Japanese scripts.

How much of your work is about building or creating value - that is, taking very low value source materials - posters/leaflets and making them into art?

That's a real aspect of the work. I like that, it's also upcycling. Normally, printed matter, be it posters or brochures, disappears after a short time. I often collect brochures in paper garbage cans. I keep them alive and create a value they didn't have before. Through the artistic process, simple posters and advertising brochures become high quality, exclusive works of art. I know it sounds crazy, I sometimes feel that the material is very happy to be living on.

With that in mind, are you selling your work?

Yes, I sell my work. Even if with a heavy heart. When I've sold a work, I'm always a bit sorry that it's gone. It's always then that I think: Damn, why do I have to sell this collage now? But, of course, I'm also happy when other people like my work.



“
Through the artistic process, simple posters and advertising brochures become high quality, exclusive works of art.

What does the act of collaging give back to you?

For me, collaging is a very special process. I forget the time and everything around me. It's a luxury and a happy experience. It can also be very exhausting, and I often ask myself why I do this to myself. But in the end, the satisfaction comes from creating new compositions – a form from typography, which is coherent and correct and with which I can live. Typography would also be satisfied with the result, I think to myself. Typography is, for me, a kind of 'living being' for which I have respect.

There are always doubts – *Is what I am doing right? What happens if I stick this one piece in this particular place, what changes in the entire composition? How does the relationship to the background change? When do the interiors become an independent form in contrast to the background?* I find these changes very exciting. I work in different places, the large collages are usually created outside and I make them mainly in the summer. The small ones are created everywhere, even on vacation with my wife and son in the kitchen of a vacation home. This sometimes leads to discussions, when there are scraps of paper everywhere! I am very grateful to my wife and my son for indulging my passion.

I need this free, artistic work. If I have not glued for several weeks, I get grumpy and something is missing. Again, a need for balance. I think a quote from Grayson Perry, the 2003 Turner Prize winner,

sums it up very well: *'It's important to make art because those who benefit most from it may be the people who make it.'*

Are there other artists that inspire you?

I admire Cecil Touchon for his freedom with typography. He creates outstanding de-constructivist compositions. Likewise the assemblages of Rosalie Gascoigne (an Australian artist), also because of their very own aesthetics. I like the simple forms of Jean Arp and Elsworth Kelly very much because of their clarity, simplicity and uncompromising approach. And I love the English landscape painting of David Hockney.

What plans do you have for your work over the coming year?

I am currently preparing an exhibition in my hometown near the French and Luxembourg border for February 2024 where I'll only show collages that consist of material that I have found in this area. I'll also be showing my first wooden three dimensional letter-composition. I keep applying for exhibitions and I plan to make a small catalogue with my works soon.

You can see more of Thomas' work on his Instagram page: [@thomasschneiderart](https://www.instagram.com/thomasschneiderart) and on his website: thomasschneider-art.de