

# Visual design



Ninety-five things you need to know.  
Told in Helvetica and dingbats.

Jim Krause

CREATIVE CORE



BOOK**01**

Visual  
design



## 28 THEMATIC IMAGERY

Whether you realize it or not, every logo, illustration, or image you create emits conveyances: intangible themes like strength, creativity, order, precision, antiquity, and grace.

It's important to avoid letting these thematic conveyances happen willy nilly. Take control: Identify the themes you want your logo, layout, or illustration to deliver to its target audience and then get down to business creating a piece that not only looks good, but also accurately conveys the abstract inferences you're aiming for.

In the graphic arts, themes could be thought of as descriptors you would like to see associated with the company, person, product, or message your creation is connected with. Six such descriptors are listed in this column's first paragraph. Here are some more: elegance, brawn, gentleness, hi-tech, depression-era, futurism, fragility, exuberance, speediness, solidity, efficiency, casualness, urbanity, childishness, orderliness, retro-kitsch, and back-to-nature.

Half the battle, when it comes to identifying and delivering meaningful thematic conveyances, lies simply in acknowledging that these abstract entities exist and that they are crucial components of any effective work of design or art. Once this has been taken care of, it then becomes a matter of accepting your responsibility as a designer and finding ways of giving form to these non-tangible conveyances through well chosen typefaces, colors, and imagery—as well as through canny choices involving the compositional and stylistic appearance of your creation.

Write down relevant themes the next time you begin a design project. Come up with lists of on-target adjectives and use these lists to help judge the visual and stylistic choices you make while working. Not only will this streamline decision-making processes as you explore options, it will also help you come up with a legitimate rationale for the content and the appearance of your logo, layout, or illustration—a rationale that your client might enjoy hearing.



en ink sprat historical figure  
encil signature hand lettered  
ewriter desk lamp  
notebook desk pencil sharpener  
bookends  
bookshe f  
per briefcase  
ink shoulder bag  
htbulb person  
line drawing abstract  
civilized eye-catching  
decisive  
archival drawing



## DELIVERING VISUALS

# 29 EFFECTS

Eye-catching special effects were once only available through time-consuming darkroom magic or the hands of a skilled illustrator. These days—thanks to the digitization of art media—things like drop-shadows, transparency effects, and dimensional treatments are each just a menu selection away. And those are just the tip of the digital effects iceberg.

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It's rarely mandatory to apply effects of any kind to a layout's components (or to a layout as a whole) but effects are often worth considering. Sometimes, just the right special effect turns out to be exactly what's needed to add a perfect finishing touch to a composition's visual impact or its conceptual message.

Learn about the effects available through programs like Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign by playing with them. For most visually oriented people (designers, illustrators, and artists included) there's simply no better way to become acquainted with digital effects than by opening a document (a blank document, a photo from your hard drive, a custom-

made illustration—it's up to you) and freely exploring your program's offering of special effects. The lessons learned during this digital playtime will almost certainly come in handy—and probably sooner than later—for real-world on-the-job projects.

All special effects are subject to the whims of fad and fancy—every bit as much as typefaces and color schemes. Drop shadows, for instance, regularly cycle in and out of favor among both designers and audiences. And not only that, but even when drop shadows seem especially popular, it's generally only a few specific styles of drop shadows that seem to have the full approval of better designers and more discerning viewers. If you pay close enough attention to the work of leading designers, it won't take long before you see the truth in this. Same goes for things like transparency illusions, shine and shimmer effects, and emboss and bevel treatments.



The image features a teal background with a cracked, ice-like texture. Numerous white snowflakes of various sizes and shapes are scattered across the surface. At the bottom, the word "eleberg" is written in large, blue, 3D block letters. The letters have a slight shadow and are partially overlaid by a small snowflake. The entire graphic is framed by a white, torn-paper-like border.

eleberg

## 30 REPRESENTATIONAL ART

Depictions of reality can be delivered straight up, as in the case of a tightly rendered illustration or a photograph.

Reality-based visuals can also be presented through stylized imagery. This is probably the widest (and most varied) category in which visuals can be placed—a category that includes contemporary modes of illustration and photography, impressionistic fine-art paintings, and era-based graphic depictions (think: flowing art nouveau designs from the 1930s, bold Soviet poster imagery from the 1950s, psychedelic album covers from the 1960s, and so on).

Depictions of reality can also be altered in ways that ensure the delivery of conveyances like surrealism, fantasy, humor, horror, or mystery.

Digital photography and image-altering software has made it easier than ever to create visuals of genres

like these using the computer, though some artists still prefer to create their conveyances of altered reality using old-school media like paints, pencils, and inks (or the digital equivalents of these traditional tools).

Are you rendering a particular subject for the logo or layout you're working on? If so, don't settle on a specific approach until you have considered your options. Look through illustration and design annuals for ideas. Look through art history books, too. Even the best illustrators regularly survey material outside their own portfolio for ideas and inspiration.

Do you possess the skills necessary to illustrate your subject as you see fit? If *yes*, then go for it. If *maybe*, then how about taking a stab at it and possibly spending some time off-the-clock teaching yourself the required skills? If *no*, then start looking for an illustrator who can pull it off for you—budget permitting.



