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**The New York Times** |By ALAN FREDN

PAUL RAND: A DESIGNER'S ART By Paul Rand. Illustrated. 239 pp. New Haven. Yale University Press. \$39.95.

IN our built environment and our civilization of manufactured objects, every product, every printed page, every urban corner has been designed, sometimes badly, sometimes well. Yet we have few opportunities to reflect on the ways designers work and to celebrate their accomplishments. Our painters, sculptors and architects are household names, but few people, apart from the members of the design community, are aware of the identities and the qualities of the principal shapers of the forms with which we are surrounded. Fewer still have an understanding of the thought processes or the intellectual preoccupations of the major designers of our time.

The curse of the designer is that he remains anonymous to those who use (and may even admire) his work. Many who read this review will recognize the characteristic logotype of the I.B.M. Corporation, with its blocky letters rendered in horizontal lines of blue or gray; the underlined "W" that appears on every Westinghouse product; or the refined, multicolored stenciled letter forms of the El Producto cigar box. But the name of the designer who created them is known primarily to his colleagues. "Paul Rand: A Designer's Art" admirably serves to introduce us to the mind and the work of the originator of these and many other memorable graphic images, and to a man who is one of the most influential and fascinating designers of our time.

Mr. Rand has uncommon taste and sensibility, and his work is as personal an expression as the painting of Miro or Matisse, and for some of the same reasons. Born in New York City in 1914. Mr. Rand studied at the Pratt Institute, the Parsons School of Design and at the Art Students League under George Grosz. At the age of

23 he became art director for the Esquire magazine company and later for the Weintraub Advertising Agency. He has taught at the Pratt Institute and Cooper Union, and from 1956 to 1969 he was professor of graphic design at Yale University. He has received the highest awards given to designers on both sides of the Atlantic. And, beyond all that, he is an author as well as an illustrator of books for children.

Professionally, Mr. Rand is a graphic designer, which is to say he creates work that is to be printed. Unlike the work of the painter, this involves the collaboration of many technicians, so the designer must work in such a way that his conception will survive the translation from drawing boards to printed page or package. Moreover, unlike other artists, the graphic designer is obliged to communicate with others if he is to succeed. As Mr. Rand puts it, "Because graphic design, in the end, deals with the spectator, and because it is the goal of the designer to be persuasive or at least informative, it follows that the designer's problems are twofold: to anticipate the spectator's reactions and to meet his own aesthetic needs."

At the very opening of his book, Mr. Rand cites Vasari's definition of design - "the animating principle of all creative processes." Mr. Rand puts to rest the common misconception that design is simply applied ornament, adornment enhancing some useful object. It is far more than that; for him, graphic design "is essentially about visual relationships - providing meaning to a mass of unrelated needs, ideas, words, and pictures. It is the designer's job to select and fit this material together - and make it interesting."

As the reader of "A Designer's Art" will see, Mr. Rand has usually succeeded in being far more than "interesting." His work can be arresting, deliciously witty, or childishly (and deceptively) direct. He has educated a generation of clients in the necessity for better graphic communication, and this cannot always have been easy. He explains that, "As the material furnished him is often inadequate, vague, uninteresting, or otherwise unsuitable for visual interpretation, the designer's task is to restate the problem."

In his book Mr. Rand has assembled and expanded on a number of the brief essays he has published over the years, and he has illustrated them with examples from his own work and from the work of others he admires. Much of his writing has appeared in out-of-the-way places and has not been readily available to the general reader, so this book is valuable on that score alone. But more to the point, Mr. Rand has chosen his illustrations brilliantly to enlarge upon the points made in the essays,

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and to show how he has given form to the ideas enunciated in his texts. If anyone has ever wondered about the intended significance of the horizontal lines in the I.B.M. corporate logotype, or how the Westinghouse symbol got to be the way it is, here is the place to find out.

It is only fair to warn the reader that this is not a how-to-do-it book. Mr. Rand's writing often poetic or allusive. He prefers example to description, and description to explanation. One does not come away from "A Designer's Art" able to emulate Mr.

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Rand or even to be a marginally competent designer. The fundamentals of the craft are left for other to describe. Instead, we are exposed to some of the elements Mr. Rand feels are fundamental to the kind of work he does - an understanding of the effective qualities of letter forms, a sensitivity to the power of symbols (even simple ones like the circle and the cross), a respect for pattern, a delight in ambiguity and comprehension of space as a major element in design. For Mr. Rand, these are the basic tools of his trade, as the musical scale is to the work of the composer.

Beyond the elegant application of these fundamentals, Mr. Rand's work is distinguished for its ready wit and richness of reference. A joke is often spoiled when it is explained, but Mr. Rand is sufficiently terse to leave it to his readers to find the fun in his designs for themselves, sensitized by a few well-chosen phrases and carefully selected references. Like so many superb designers, Mr. Rand is a man of boundless curiosity. What attracts him may not be obvious, or impressive, to the rest of us; he has found stimulation in the forms of everyday household objects, Shaker door hinges, books about the Russian Constructivists, or postcard reproductions of sculptured figures. These he transforms, with his unerring sense of proportion and scale, into printed pages that are beguiling in their freshness and clarity.

Mr. Rand describes his work with the same precision, economy and passion he displays in his graphic designs, and he lets us understand the nature of his relationships to his clients, his audience and his art. He is an unapologetic commercial artist, having devoted a career to the making of advertisements within our economy of consumption, as well as to the designing of books and posters (some in a less commercial vein) and to the education of fledgling designers. But finally, Mr. Rand sees himself in a dialogue with his audience at a more fundamental level. He writes, "It is in symbolic, visual terms that the designer ultimately realizes his perceptions and experiences; and it is in a world of symbols that man lives." That

extra layer of meaning distinguishes Mr. Rand's work and makes him at his best an artist of exceptional distinction and power.

### They Said He Couldn't Draw

When Paul Rand attended Pratt Institute in the late 1920's, there was, he says, "nothing called graphic design in this country." The orientation of the schools of the time was essentially to traditional illustration and commercial art as exemplified by the work of such artists as Maxfield Parrish and Norman Rockwell. "You heard about Raphael but not Picasso," Mr. Rand said in a telephone interview from his home in Connecticut. "I'd bring these ideas about modern art, that I got mostly in books and paintings from Europe, to school, but my teachers never had heard of them. They'd say I just didn't know how to draw. I'm sort of self-taught."

The work illustrated in "Paul Rand: A Designer's Art" spans almost 50 years, and even in the 1930's shows the basic design principles he would later use in book jackets, posters, advertisements and corporate logos. His was a modernist esthetic applied to the printed page - images and free forms, a few simplified elements clearly arranged against usually blank backgrounds.

He applied the same principles to his new book, which he not only wrote, but designed and produced. He used a flexible cover rather than a rigid one, "to make it more friendly," he said. The pages have been arranged in sequences for surprise and rhythm: "I try to keep material in contrast so you don't fall asleep - a black page, then a gray one, then a blank one." Mr. Rand made the dummies and supervised the printing. "At the printers I changed 50 percent of the book," he said. "That's part of the design process; being in complete control of production is essential for an artist."

Selecting what to include, however, was difficult. "What's in the book is really a small part of my life's work," he said, "and it was very hard to choose. You're much more objective if it's someone else's work."

### Joseph Giovannini

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Alan Fern is the director of the National Portrait Gallery in Washington and a frequent writer on the history of the graphic arts.

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