Interview: Daniel Lewandowski on Paul Rand

*Paul Rand: Defining Design* was a recent exhibition at the Museum of Design Atlanta, curated by Daniel Lewandowski. Rand (1914–1996) was the man behind some of the most recognizable logos of the 20th century, with clients such as IBM, ABC, and UPS. His creative direction animated the covers and pages of countless books and magazines, and his numerous writings—from *Thoughts on Design* (1947) to *From Lascaux to Brooklyn* (1996)—remain among the most influential in his field. Lewandowski, a freelance art director based in Alpharetta, GA, spoke to *Art Papers* about learning from Rand’s legacy.

*Art Papers: Paul Rand is well known in the design community, but what can he teach a wider audience?*

Daniel Lewandowski: One of my favorite quotes, which we put on a [4-foot by 8-foot] banner in the exhibition, is: “Don’t try to be original, just try to be good.” Rand was paraphrasing Mies van der Rohe, but it makes so much sense. One should always strive to do good work that both communicates and is aesthetically pleasing. Using the same principles (space, line, shape, contrast, balance, symmetry, etc) that have guided artists for centuries continue to apply to any creative endeavor—whether you’re designing an ad or painting portraits.

*AP: The exhibition at MODA didn’t just feature Rand’s visual work, but [also] his writings. How do these two aspects inform each other and inform their audience?*

DL: It’s his visual work that most people are familiar with, yet he wrote with such clarity. Many books written on art and aesthetics are thick, philosophical diatribes. Rand’s short, [staccato] paragraphs, paired with examples of his own work, simplify complex topics and complete the picture of his impact on the design industry. One special part about that is he never referred to other artists’ work—he didn’t want to misrepresent their intentions, so he used his own output as examples instead. It makes his story quite cohesive.

*AP: As something of a historian of print, are you concerned about the future of the medium?*

DL: It’s funny—we’ve all been hearing about the speculative “end” of print since the 1990s. Print will never die; it will simply evolve. The shininess of the digital era will fade as it becomes engrained in everyday life, but print will always be our companion. I don’t think you can ever truly take away a person’s passion to touch and hold a piece of printed material.

*AP: Do exhibitions such as yours contribute to the preservation of that material passion? What else can we do?*

DL: With the amount of material printed, it’s tough to sort and select the best representations of design today. Collecting also takes up space, and one way besides saving physically is to keep a digital record. I’ve personally begun to scan every piece of original printed material at high resolution—so when they’ve all disintegrated, we’ll still have a quality file to reproduce them from. It’s time-consuming, but in the scheme of history, it’s worth it.