



IN THE WORDS OF

MILTON GLASER

Born in 1929, New York, New York
Resides in New York, New York

QUESTION: You continue to maintain a very active practice and yet you find time to work on all sorts of projects. How do you choose what causes you support and how do you find the time to do it? I never understand when people ask me that. I mean, all I've got is time, and I've always worked a lot and I love working and there always seems to be time enough for everything, I don't know how that works, I never work at night these days. For many, many years, everything is done during the course of daily activity. But I don't know how to respond to that. Well first of all I work very fast. I've always have and um...that may be part of the answer

COCHRAN: I think that must be the answer, for many of us we are more challenged to be able to get that kind of work done quickly and especially the quality of work that you are able to produce. Are you optimistic about the impact artists and designers can have on resolving social issues or calling attention to social concerns? Well, I don't know. I am truly incapable of answering, I mean, I don't know who has an affect on what. I also know that the direct consequences of any action are incomprehensible. My feeling is just do the best you can and try to work in a way that affects people. Whether it does or not, is another story, but in terms of personal intervention those are the things that interest me.

QUESTION: Do you think you have a responsibility to respond to the things you care about? I grew up in a time, and it's funny I was just talking to a friend at lunch, where in a very left wing era where the idea of

unions and common purpose and the generosity to the public was very much part of my upbringing. I was born in 1929 and grew up during the depression, and the great thing about the depression was the sense of community and generosity that people had towards one another, and the idea of that's what you did in life. You helped other people and you were nice to other people and if there was no soup on the table somebody would come down and bring you some.

That sense of commonality, and of friendship towards others is what I grew up with. It's the only way I know to be in the world. To transfer that sense into a more, one might say, "dog eat dog environment" is something incomprehensible to me. I think being generous to other people is part of the contract you make with life. It's not about being a designer. God knows what the responsibilities of designers are. It's about being a good citizen... The only thing about designers is that occasionally they have a way of intervening in life that is seen by others, and that communicates to others, and in theory communication is something we are supposed to know something about. So every once in a while there's an opportunity that comes along where you can say something and assume that other people hear it, but outside of that I don't know about those fancy words about responsibility and what a designer's role is. A design is, one would hope, just as defined by the nature of your connection to others as any is other practice.

QUESTION: That's a wonderful answer, thank you. I want to ask you about something that I hope this is not controversial. One of your most iconic designs is the "I LOVE NEW YORK" logo, and I would say that that it has inspired a lot of imitations. How do you feel about that? About the way that that work has gone on and been copied. Is it flattering? Is it annoying? Well, think about it for a minute. You enter the world of design because you want to influence others. You want your work to be seen. You want to have an effect on people, right? And when that happens you're grateful. I mean it's terrific that something that you have done has spread throughout the world and has had an effect, right? That's what you live for. It's the feeling that you're not alone doing this work in some darkened room where it will never be seen, so you do something like that. And of course you become influential in your life through imitation. The whole field of design is based on imitation. We like to be a little more gracious in the way of describing it... Imitation or influence or plagiarism, take your pick. But that's the way work enters into society. If you're somebody who was in the design profession where it's all about your relationship to how you communicate to others, you feel very fortunate when something you have done is influential. The only issue comes about in a capitalist society. All ideas become property and you get nervous when your property is used by others to their advantage. But I don't feel that ideas are property. I mean I think they basically exist to be transmitted.

QUESTION: This brings me to another subject, when we talk about ideas being property. You've talked a lot about the role of art and design and

what separates them and so forth...I'm recalling an interview you did on CBS years ago, and I may be misquoting you, because I'm relying on my memory, but I think you said "Do not confuse art and design, they are not the same thing but there are places where they touch"...does that sound familiar?

Yes, it does.

QUESTION: Can you discuss that distinction between art and design?

Well I have a long explanation of that and I'll give you highlights from it. I've been thinking about what is art for all my life, and only in the last couple of years I got a kind of picture that seems to make sense to me, which is that since art exists, in every society throughout history, it must have a purpose. And things that persist like art have a purpose in survival. So in a simplistic way art is a survival mechanism. Which is that art itself helps the culture to survive. So how does it do this? Well, it does that by encouraging one of the characteristics of human beings, which is attentiveness.

Art has the possibility to make us attentive, which is that we are more aware what is "real" (I use that word with quotes around it) than we are when we are not attentive. In the Buddhist sense, attentiveness is about acknowledging what is, and art helps us do that. It engages us in a way that when we pass a forest we say, "oh, that looks just like a Cezanne". Well what has happened is that through the act of looking at a Cezanne, you now see the forest in a different way than you would have if you had not seen the Cezanne. So in a reductive sense art helps us understand what we are looking at and understand what is real. Because, as we know, there's nothing out there, there's only what is in the brain and the mind that makes things real. So that's the purpose of art. And beauty is a device that nature has given us to lead us to attentiveness... So this attentiveness can be produced by almost anything. Which is to say that a work of design, say a poster by Toulouse-Lautrec, can make us attentive in the same way as a painting does.

But obviously not every poster has that capacity; then again, not everybody is Lautrec. So there is a relationship between this notion... ..of beauty, attentiveness, and survival that I think occasionally occurs in design, but since design has a different purpose, which is to accomplish a task, it is not quite the same as the purpose of art. But as I said long ago, they occasionally converge.

QUESTION: Ok, ok. We were talking about plagiarism earlier and so I would like to plagiarize the entire answer to use in my classroom. It's a wonderful answer, thank you so much.

Anytime.

QUESTION: One of the things that you discussed is that until recently we've had this idea that art exists for its own sake, and you've talked frequently about the fact that this is a fairly recent notion. You also talk about the value of art, I think, and I was thinking about an example

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the other day, maybe you saw this story, it was a Leonardo drawing that was discovered, and was thought to have been done by one of his students. I heard this story on NPR. It turns out it may have been done by Leonardo and therefore, all of the sudden its value has increased. And so you wonder, well, is it suddenly more beautiful because we know it was done by Leonardo? And I think you have discussed this sort of thing in the past, when you talked about how we assign value to art. Do you want to comment on that? Well it's a wonderful subject, right, which is to say, "why would something that has no, in theory, material value, become so valuable." But you have to separate art with its purpose of creating attentiveness from art as a marketable commodity. I mean the art business is a racket. It's basically built on illusion and on status and on money and everything else. One must stop confusing the art business with the purpose of art or the appreciation of art. I mean, it is a racket, and people take advantage of it, and it is based on the idea of scarcity in the same way as any other commodity is available. But the truth of the matter is that certain things within the context of art, like a Leonardo drawing (has value) because Leonardo has that ability to make us attentive.

We might say that the great artists, the ones we historically have determined are great, all have that in common. They change our perception of the world when we have seen the work of art. And that is the criteria, I have to say. If it changes your perception of the world, it's art. If it doesn't change your perception of the world, no matter how decorative, it's not.

QUESTION: Can I talk about your history in teaching, your association with the School of Visual Arts? May I ask you about that? Sure.

QUESTION: You've worked on a numerous posters for them. You designed at one time an identity program for them, and you've been a member of the faculty... I have.

QUESTION: You're no longer still in the faculty, are you? I'm still am on the faculty, I'm still teaching, I'm also the acting chair of the school.

QUESTION: How do you like working with students? Does teaching enrich your life as a designer or your life in general? Do you find it an enriching experience? Well, I've been doing it for over 50 years and

if you persist in doing something for fifty years without appreciating it or getting something from it, you're nuts! So, I like to teach, I like to pass on what I know. If I didn't enjoy teaching, I wouldn't teach and I think the sadness about teaching is that so many people that teach, teach basically to make a living, long after they have enjoyed the experience of teaching.

You can tell the difference; there are those teachers who are enthusiastic about teaching because they find they are more energized after an afternoon of teaching than before, and that's a good sign. In general observing your own energy level is a good way to determine whether you should be doing something or not. I love to teach, I continue to do it. I suppose one day I'll say enough but that day has not yet arrived.

QUESTION: I can't wait to share those thoughts with my colleagues at UTEP. We do tend to see that energy level among our folks here but I know what you're talking about. What advice do you have for students of graphic design? How would you encourage them to express their individual concerns about social issues? I studied with Giorgio Morandi, back in Bologna in 1951-52. Morandi was a great teacher... and he taught me something about teaching which was that what students get out of teachers is not what they say but what they are. And when you're in the presence of Morandi, his reassurance and his commitment to what the idea of art was, his life itself was a model of what you aspire to be.

As a result of that he was a great teacher, even though in all those years he talked to me, I've told the story often, about art only twice; once was when we were in the Academia, passing a giant painting by Guido Reni which had a hundred figures and he pointed to the foot of one of the saints and he said "Guido Reni painted great feet" that was one lesson, and the other was a lesson that occurred as you were standing in front of a bath of acid that your about to plunge your etching plate into, he was teaching hard ground etching at the time, and Morandi would be by your side and before you plunge your plate in the acid he would say "coraggio" and incidentally that's what I would say to all of your inspiring graphic design students. Corraggio.

QUESTION: Coraggio. Thank you very much, I appreciate that and I will share that with them. Do you have any further comments you would like to make, any projects your working on, anything you'll like to share with us at this point? No...I think I've said everything I know...

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QUESTION: I doubt you've said everything you know...
but this has been a very enlightening interview,
it was wonderful to speak with you.
Thank you very much.

QUESTION: You should know that I've used many of your ideas in
teaching over the years and my students find it very helpful.
That's great

QUESTION: Thank you so much
Good luck and courage!

QUESTION: I'll try to keep both!
Ciao-ciao

