

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Vision, Process, Product



Louis D. Ocepek



Fig. 1-9. René Galindo, Signi corporate identity, Mexico City, Mexico, 1996.

particularly vital because it also serves as a sample of the company's work. The theme behind the mark designed by René Galindo for his own design business, Signi, starts with the name itself (fig. 1-9). The word *Signi* is derived from words such as *sign*, *signify*, *signet*, and *signal*, all of which bear some relationship to the work of a design company. The tastefully modified typeface, restrained, elegant, and beautifully rendered, articulates the skill, preeminence, and professionalism of the Signi studio. The color red was chosen for its affirmative energy, symbolizing the life force and positive action. By building its identity from the ground up, and applying its design style consistently to each component of the company's promotional material, Signi successfully displays its design prowess while accentuating its business acumen.

Vaughn Wedeen Creative was called upon to design a very complicated graphic tool for U S West Communications (now Qwest Communications). The company, introducing its Leveraged Compensation Plan to employees, needed a calculator its employees could use to estimate their earnings potential under a new agreement (fig. 1-10). The calculator, which consists of a slotted, cardstock sleeve with a sliding inner card, by necessity contains a profusion of text, requiring the use of very small type sizes in a very small layout space. The production standards for a project of this kind are very high; in order for the calculator to work properly, the figures on the inner card have to be perfectly aligned with the die-cut slots and text on the outer sleeve. Vaughn Wedeen used gridlike subdivisions, bold sans serif type, and color-coding to bring clarity and functionality to the complicated subject matter. As a result, the calculator is inviting and easy to use, while the rhythmic pattern of the typographic arrangement and the coordinated color palette are visually pleasing. The project demonstrates how a designer can bring coherence and esthetic quality to the most pedestrian assignment.

the devil's claw plant to represent the harsh beauty of the Chihuahuan Desert. The beautifully detailed typographic design, the artistic treatment of the images, and the restrained color palette contribute to the projection of a positive point of view.

In a limited-edition poster, *Bars and Stars*, René Galindo, a designer from Mexico City, expressed his strong views regarding the plight of Mexican immigrants working in the United States (fig. 4-3). Certain graphic icons (such as the American flag, the swastika, or the cross) engender emotion by association with events, institutions, or belief systems. Designers describe these images as being “loaded,” or “charged.” It’s almost guaranteed that they will evoke a response of some kind from the audience. Galindo, looking for an image powerful enough to carry his message, decided on the American flag. To make his political point, he replaced the flag’s conventional red stripes with bars of red text, overprinted on a posterized image of a farm worker. (Notice how the text in each bar was perfectly spaced to maintain the rectangular shape of the flag.) Widely letterspaced, reversed-out text was used to replace the white stars normally found in the flag’s blue star-field. The poster was *screenprinted* using opaque inks, ensuring a brilliant color palette and the complete *overprinting* of the figure. The accumulated image manipulations cause the reader to consider the meaning of the American flag from a contrasting point of view, not

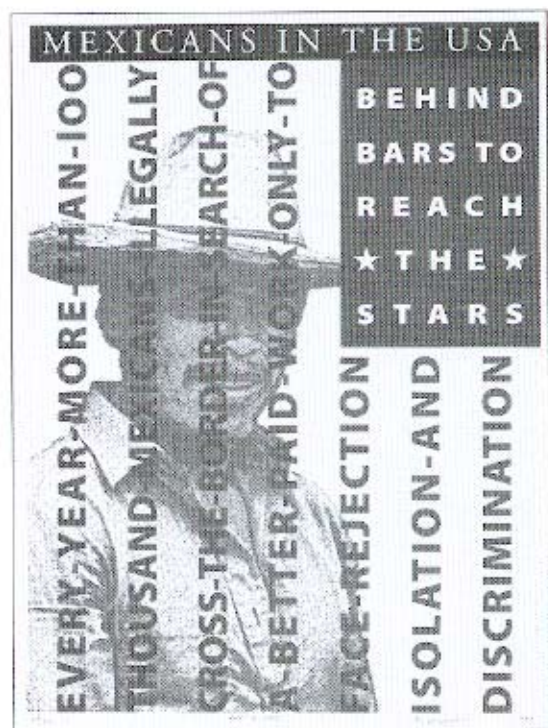


Fig. 4-3. René Galindo, poster, *Bars and Stars*. New Mexico Center for the Graphic Arts, Art Department, New Mexico State University, 1999.

only as a traditional symbol of freedom and independence, but, ironically for some immigrant workers, as a symbol of imprisonment.

Issues themselves, as well as images, can trigger a reaction. To create meaningful graphic design about a charged issue, the designer must have a good understanding of the subject. Loaded issues have already received heavy media attention; the people who care about the subject will have prior knowledge and will scrutinize the work closely. Therefore, each aspect of the design must be carefully considered. Once the work is distributed to the public, particularly in *print*, it's too late to make changes.

Cuba is an example of a highly charged issue, the result of a long history of political and economic conflict with the United States. The author designed the cover of a special issue of the literary journal *Puerto del Sol* devoted to Cuban poetry (fig. 4-4). After discussing the assignment with editor in chief Kevin McIlvoy, he began to do research on the general subject of Cuba, so he would have an informed point of view. After discarding material that seemed unworkable or irrelevant, there remained several ideas that had either visual or conceptual potential. The goal was to integrate the visual and conceptual ideas into a comprehensive design that communicated a balanced point of view.

The final design can be *deconstructed* into its component parts, to show how they were interrelated. The style of the cover was meant to be dramatic.



Fig. 4-4. Louis Ocepek, book cover, CUBA. *Puerto del Sol*, New Mexico State University, 2001. Photography, Kathleene West.

which light and heat will radiate. After establishing that basic structure, hundreds of variations can be derived (fig. 6-15). The snowflake is another generic form that has a geometric structure and infinite variations. When creating alternate solutions, reversing the image is one of the first things a designer tries. Depending on the complexity of the form, even this simple alternative can be interesting (fig. 6-16). After making hand-drawn studies, or *thumbnails*, the computer is a tremendously valuable tool for making the many variations designers produce before settling on a particular direction or design solution. At a certain point, some of the more successful studies are presented to the client for discussion and approval.

Symbols are used to illustrate not only physical objects, but abstract ideas as well. Daniel Castelao of Signi Design, a company specializing in corporate identity programs, created a combination mark for an upscale real

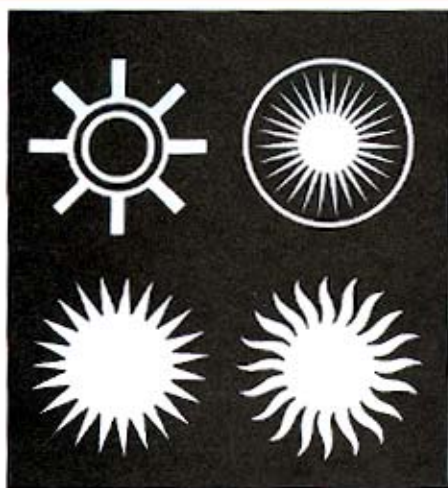


Fig. 6-15. Clarence P. Hornung, pictographs, *The Solar Variant, Handbook of Design and Devices*, Dover Publications, 1946.



Fig. 6-16. Clarence P. Hornung, pictographs, *The Snow Crystal, Handbook of Design and Devices*, Dover Publications, 1946.

Fig. 6-17. Daniel Castelao, Signi Design, symbol Las Misiones, 1999.

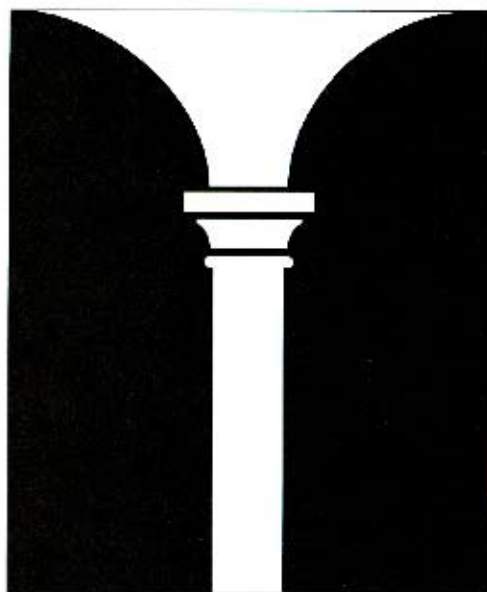


Fig. 6-18. Daniel Castelao, Signi Design, combination identity mark, Las Misiones, 1999.

estate development in Mexico City. He combined an abstract symbol (**fig. 6-17**) with a *logotype* or *word design* that spells out the full name of the development (**fig. 6-18**).

Abstract symbols, when used alone, require multiple exposures over a long period of time to attain recognition and acceptance. With a combination mark, however, the text reinforces the meaning of the pictorial symbol, ensuring almost immediate communication. A combination mark, having two components, is more visually complex than either a symbol or a logotype used alone. It has more presence on the page or screen, offers more options

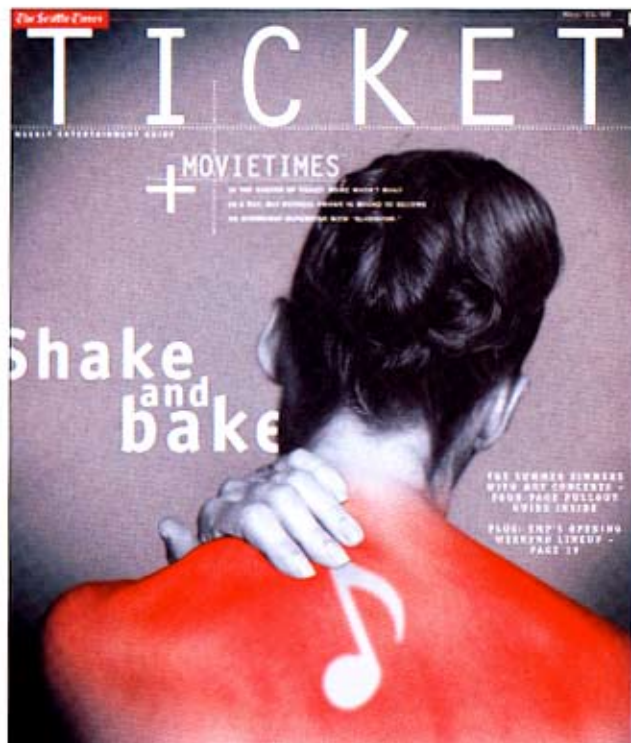
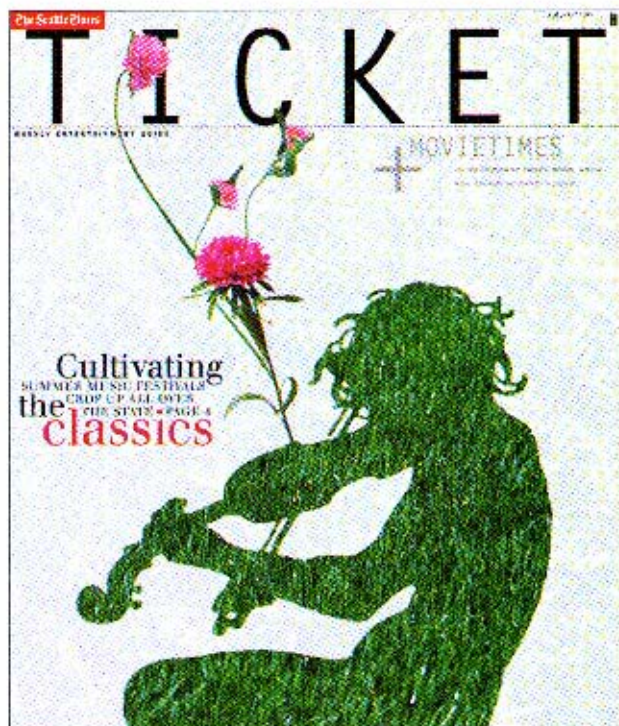


Fig. 12-8. Jeff Neumann, cover, *Shake and Bake*, *Ticket*, *The Seattle Times*, 1999.

For the summer 2000 cover of *Ticket*, Neumann used color in both a descriptive and a symbolic fashion (fig. 12-9). Titled *Cultivating the Classics*, the issue reviews summer classical music festivals around the state. The principal image, a beautifully decorative silhouette of a violin-playing idyll, establishes a classical aura while flowers emanating from the violin symbolize music. The silhouette, completely lacking interior anatomical detail, is filled instead with a flat pattern of green grass, simultaneously expressing both summer and the outdoors. The flowers, in contrast to the almost *monochromatic* grass, are full color, their form as rich, lyrical, and dimensional as the music they symbolize.

Just as color can be employed to express a mood or emotion, it can also be used to make evident certain social or cultural associations. René Galindo's cover design for *Diseño Grafico en Mexico*, a juried annual published by Quorum, a professional graphic design organization, unites form and color to exemplify Mexican design (fig. 12-10). The most immediate impression projected by the cover design is that of color; the entire wheel of primary, secondary, and intermediate colors is represented, each color intensely saturated for maximum effect. Complementary pairs contribute to a sumptuously rich palette, while soft tints are used to create a subtle third dimension. The color statement suggests Mexican folk art, wedded to the geometry of Aztec or

Fig. 12-9. Jeff Neumann, *cover, Cultivating the Classics, Ticket, The Seattle Times, 2000.*



Mayan architecture. The central image, heavily outlined in black, serves quadruple duty: a stepped pyramid, a technical pen or pencil, a modern skyscraper, a pixelated electronic design. Looking closer, one also sees the hot magenta sun, surrounded by a high purple sky, and, just beneath the horizon line, the bright green of the fertile earth. With each element firmly locked into place, the symmetrical design epitomizes the essence of classical graphic design.

The versatility of full-color printing is thoroughly exploited by designer Joe Erceg in his poster for a celebratory fireworks display (**fig. 12-11**). Touted as “A Theatre of Fire, Color and Sound,” the project provided the perfect opportunity to link color exploration with subject matter. Erceg’s insistently symmetrical poster is bright, playful, and energetic, somewhat reminiscent of a nineteenth-century *broadside*. The showpiece of the poster, a dazzling pinwheel of fire, explodes out from its center point, leaving waning trails of tiny colored stars in its wake. Four fireworks towers flank the central design, each carrying pinwheels on their armatures, the artwork saturated with various combinations of the process ink colors (CMYK). Erceg cleverly reversed the tone of the night sky, making it white rather than black (*achromatic*), simultaneously emulating the explosive white light cast by the fireworks, accentuating the radiant colors of the pinwheel, and silhouetting the awestruck children watching the show.

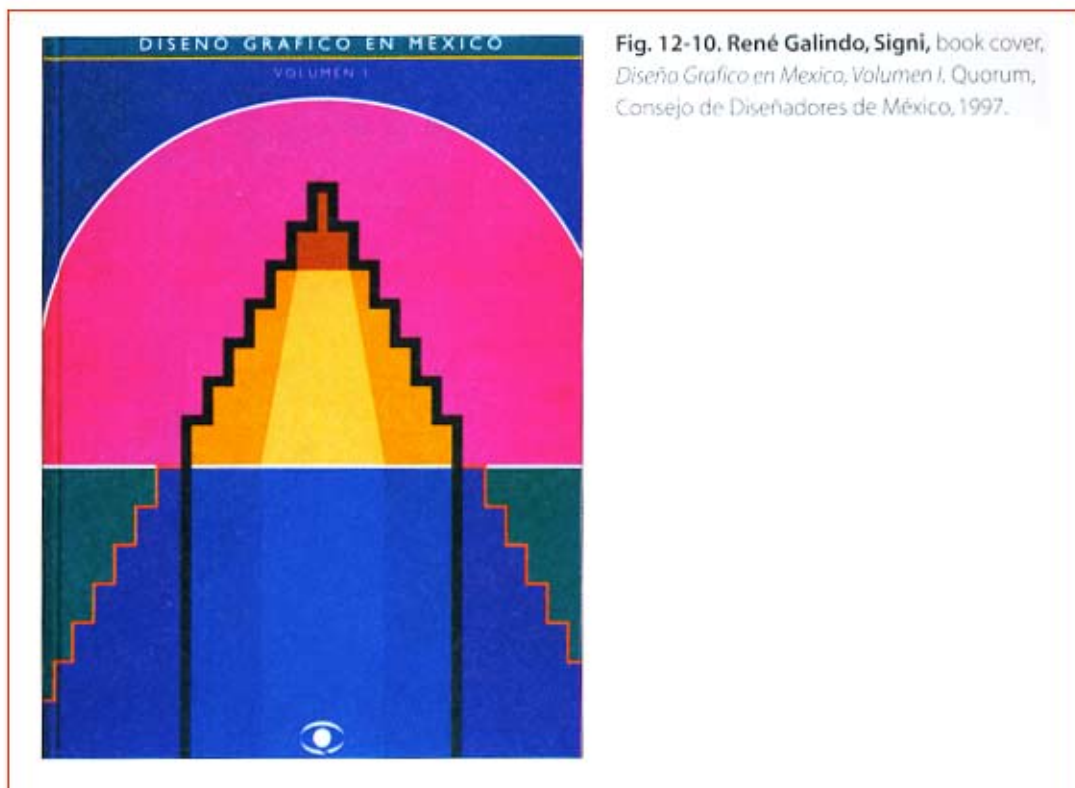


Fig. 12-10. René Galindo, Signi, book cover, *Diseño Grafico en Mexico, Volumen I*, Quorum, Consejo de Diseñadores de México, 1997.

The full-color technology of print and electronic media makes possible the emulation of “natural,” or photographic color, as well as infinite tints and color combinations. Computer technology enables designers to profoundly alter real color to either enhance communication or create artistic effect. Rick Valicenti and Mark Rattin of Thirst Studio, uncompromising, passionate explorers of new directions in design, manipulate media in a celebratory spirit of graphic self-expression. In their collaborative poster, *Mother*, advertising an extended lecture and design workshop by Valicenti, conventional, full-color imagery is united with digitally manipulated form to create an enticingly abstruse visionary icon (fig. 12-12). A physically manipulated vernacular typeface is used for the background text, its rough-hewn texture in deliberate contrast to the smooth, full-color perfection of the heavily art directed fashion photo of “mother.” Subjected to further processing in a 3-D modeling program, the typeface reappears as an essentially monochromatic word sculpture, uncomfortably floating at, or on, the model’s neck, tagging her as “mother.” The forward-looking, emotionally detached figure drifts up and into the layout from off-camera, her torso rendered in smeary shades of full color, disturbingly biomorphic. Ingeniously, the designers melded conventional and experimental technology to create a stunningly memorable graphic entity.