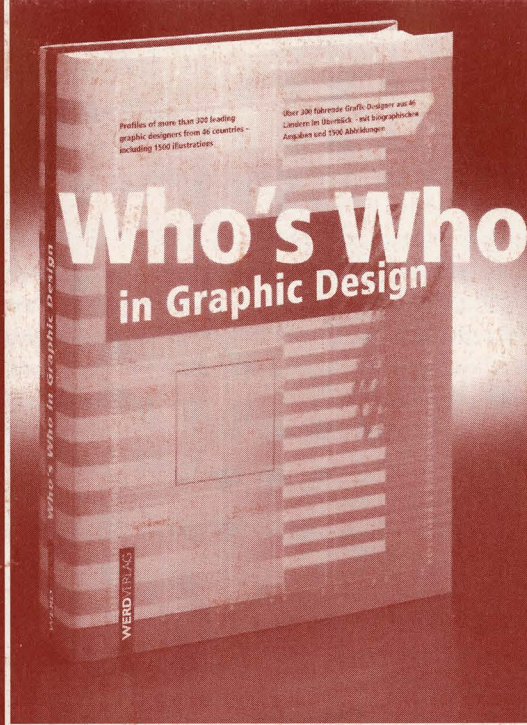




Who's Who in Graphic Design

1994. Zurich: Benteli-Werd Verlags AG, 597 pp., hard cover, illustrated, text in English and German. sFr.289

Reviewed by Eunice Basson

Work on this mammoth publication began in 1993 under the supervision of Andrea Grossholz who was appointed as Project Co-ordinator. The first *Who's Who* in the field of graphic design was published in the sixties by Walter Amstutz. A second volume followed in 1982 entitled *Who's Who in*

Graphic Art, also published by Walter Amstutz. Now twelve years later the new publishers, Benteli-Werd, have compiled this comprehensive directory entitled *Who's Who in Graphic Design*. The title change is indicative of the developments which have taken place within this discipline and reflects the recognition currently enjoyed by international graphic design.

Right from the outset I should like to mention the excellent workmanship of the Benteli-Werd Publishing House in the production of this book. From its strong functional matt dust cover, finely crafted linen binding, clear readable type and eye catching layout, to the immensely rich and informative content, this book is a potential award winner at any international book fair.

This comprehensive but by no means, I am sure, complete source book boasts profiles of more than 300 leading graphic designers from 46 countries. It includes 1500 colour as well as black and white illustrations. The entry to each country's graphic designers is preceded by an introductory text which forms a valuable background contextualisation to the visual work.

One of the main objectives of the publication is to focus on the work of a new generation of designers from the past decade. The selected collections of work illustrate aspects of international uniformity on the one hand, and national individuality on the other. Although visual communication through graphic design has the ability to convey a message across international borders and technological developments within the field of graphic design have no

geographic boundaries, one is struck by the significant cultural differences between contributing designers from various countries when looking at the work represented.

This fusing of the national and international is particularly pertinent to South Africa at present, where it has become a vital issue within graphic design circles to tap cross cultural resources. In her introduction to graphic design in South Africa, Prof Marian Sauthoff, who heads the information design unit at the University of Pretoria, comments on an historic legacy which encouraged the tendency by designers to look towards international design trends in search of acceptability and solutions, rather than extracting from the vast indigenous wealth of the African continent. However, within an emerging post-apartheid society designers are re-thinking their situation and re-positioning themselves as they search for a truly South African expression in their work which incorporates African as well as international influences.

She accurately positions the contemporary situation in South Africa when she states that

...the exploration of African roots, the restructuring of curricula to accommodate industry developments, relevant post-graduate study and the training of a new generation of multi-racial designers are current focus points in design education (p 429).

Notwithstanding these valid focus points and the fact that South African graphic designers have in the past been inter-

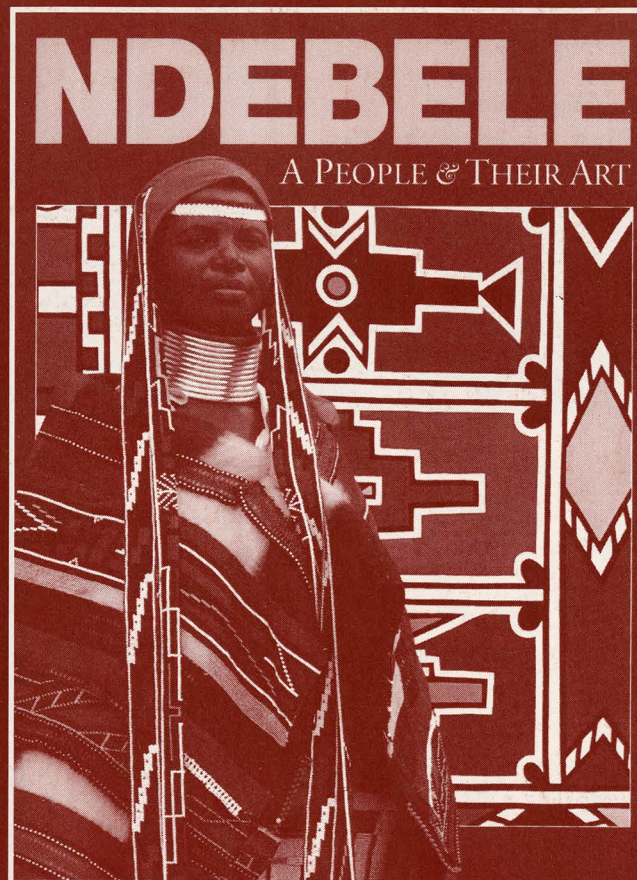
nationally awarded for their work, it is ironic that the work of only one South African designer is featured in this publication.

Although the work of Mark Posnett is highly regarded, it is hardly an indication of the standard of design which has been established on this southern tip of the African continent over the last few decades. Nor does it bear evidence of the cross culturalisation of design ideas which is being established at present.

One would have liked to have seen a more comprehensive representation of the work of South African designers in this prestigious publication. Did the selectors feel that South African design was not up to standard or was there a lack of interest on the part of designers in submitting their work? It would be interesting to hear what graphic designers here have to say with regard to a missed opportunity and the possible chance to have been represented in a publication of this status and magnitude.

It must be stated, however, that this is a pioneering and definitive source book within the international field of graphic design. It is highly recommended as an essential reference for a broad readership. It will enable practitioner, researcher and student alike to form an overall impression of global contemporary graphic design, as well as an understanding of each country and designer's position in this framework.

The publication may be ordered directly from Benteli-Werd Verlags AG, Verena Konzette-Str.11 CH-8021 Zurich FAX +41 (0)1 248 50 39 at sFr.298.- per copy plus sFr.45.- for postage.



Ndebele - A People and their Art

by Ivor Powell. 1995. Cape Town: Struik Publishers, 160 pp., hard cover, illustrated, available in English or German text, R125.

Reviewed by Jeanne van Eeden

African tribal art has been well represented by monographs in recent years, with books such as M H Nooter's *Secrecy: African Art that Conceals and Reveals* (1993) making valuable contributions to the understanding of the ritualistic implications of African art. In *Ndebele - A People and their Art* Powell attempts a contextual examination of the art of the Ndebele against the background of their culture and beliefs. Powell also demonstrates the enormous influence the Ndebele have had on current South African visual style, to the extent that Ndebele imagery has virtually become synonymous with 'the quintessentially African look' (p 138).

In the introductory sections Powell sketches the history of the Ndebele and the development of their distinctive artistic expression against the background of colonial influence and white rule, right up to the 1994 election. Powell shows that the Ndebele have not been immune to urbanization and detribalization. He examines questions of tribal identity and the perpetuation of traditional imagery, which are linked to the Ndebele's belief in a spirit world and their veneration of ancestors. Contrary to Western Modernist ideals of originality and uniqueness, Ndebele art has been informed by the need to uphold traditional images in order to establish cultural continuity and cohesion.

In spite of this, the inevitable predominant influence of urbanization led to stylistic adaptations in Ndebele murals and beadwork, which consequently show the results of 'the interface between African and European cultures' (p 143). It is significant, as Powell points out, that although Ndebele murals date only from the 1940s, they immediately came to signify the traditional Ndebele artform. Wallpainting was linked to commercial considerations and the tourist industry, and picturesque settlements such as KwaMsiza were initiated specifically to function as a 'traditional Ndebele village' (p 52).