

Print Magazine, 1940-2017

by Steven Heller

Despite the certainty of inevitability, there is a human mechanism called hope. We hope what will be won't be—*cio che sara sara non sera*. Well, it's here! The inevitable has arrived. And it is still a shock.

What you are currently holding in your hands and reading at this very moment is the result of the inexorable (and inevitable) march of digital progress that we otherwise love so much, the fulfillment of the prediction that has been bandied about since the advent of the Macintosh and the term *desktop publishing* in the mid-1980s.

This is the end of *Print!*

That is, the end of *Print* as a printed magazine—the final paper and ink issue of the longest continually published graphic design periodical in the United States and the world, founded in 1940. Despite all the telltale indicators of probable extinction, *Print* has not merely survived much longer than ever expected, but it has evolved through the first 18 years of the 21st century,

along with the radical shifts in aesthetics, media, politics and art. Indeed, often on the crest of these phenomena, *Print* has been a nimble chronicler of what is now, new and next.

Still, the shock of the inevitable is accompanied by the sadness and grief over the unavoidable. The media world is a different place, and graphic design is a profession now in perpetual flux. *Design thinking*, anyone?

Yet this is neither a bitter reproach nor a sentimental epitaph.

Don't cry for *Print* Argentina.

Rather, celebrate its legacy and the contributions it has made over the years through an incredible ebb and flow of dedicated people who've been forever preserved in its published pages. Someday, perhaps, there will be a proper history written about



1940 Issue 1—*Print's* first cover.

the various incarnations of the magazine as a cornerstone of printing, type, typography, commercial art and communications media history, but this is not that story. Rather, as a contributor for close to 40 years and as a reader for even longer, this will be a sort of condensed memoir about what for me and many others is more than a mere magazine, but a community—in a sense, a family—of shared interest that has promoted, critiqued, enlightened and introduced a broad swath of art and craft from which its readers have carved out not only careers but creative lives.

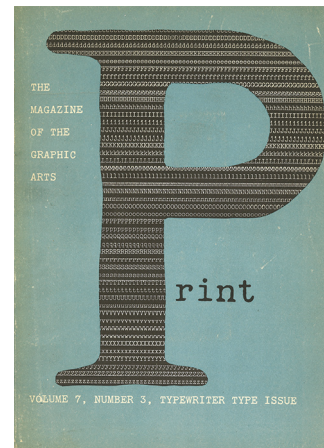
... OK, damn. Thinking about it like that makes it even harder. It's easier to accept the final episodes of "The Sopranos" or "Game of Thrones"; they will be replaced by other shows. This finality, for me, is more than the end of an era or close of a chapter; like the meteor that presumably wiped out the dinosaurs, this is an upheaval I feel in my gut.

The dinosaurs didn't know they were dinosaurs (i.e., something outdated or obsolete because of failure to adapt to changing circumstances) because in their little minds, I presume, they were always there and would continue to be. For me, *Print* was always there. It was not necessarily on the edge, but it was a fixture of graphic design culture (along with *Graphis*, *Communication Arts* and *Art Direction* magazines) that proffered the standards that designers and illustrators sought to attain. To be anointed in *Print* was verification and validation—a *Good Design* keeping Seal of Approval. Young and old (at a certain point, more than 50,000 subscribers, plus more pass-arounds) accepted *Print* into their studios and firms. In return, *Print* provided a healthy diet of essential information, educated speculation and necessary affirmation. *Print* was the magazine that broke my heart when, as a young designer, it rejected my work (we won't go into why here) but later raised my sense of purpose when its editor, Martin Fox, and art director, Andy Kner, invited me to start writing for them.

Print was not the first nor the only design magazine I wrote for, but it was the one where, starting in the late 1970s, I wrote continuously, without missing a single issue. *Print* enabled me to grow as a design and illustration essayist, journalist and critic. For one who had missed out on a college education, *Print* was my undergrad and grad school—and Fox was my tutor-in-residence. Of course, it was not just a one-way relationship: I brought story ideas and thematic issues that *Print* had not previously covered. I initiated, among many things, "A Cold Eye" (Fox's title), the first devoted critical column in a design journal. Under Fox's cool eye and open mind, I helped raise the magazine from a trade mag to a culture mag. Today, it is possible to look through its hundreds of back issues and more or less come away with a pretty accurate historical understanding of the roles of graphic, packaging, environmental, film design, illustration, political graphic commentary and technological advancement, as well as the successes, trials and tribulations of a wide range of the field's major and minor players—the names and work of talents remembered and forgotten, original and derivative, past and present. *Print* never was a slave to fashion or tradition but balanced all sides while sometimes taking sides in the "design discourse." *Print* was predictable and unpredictable. Fox was



1942 Issue 1



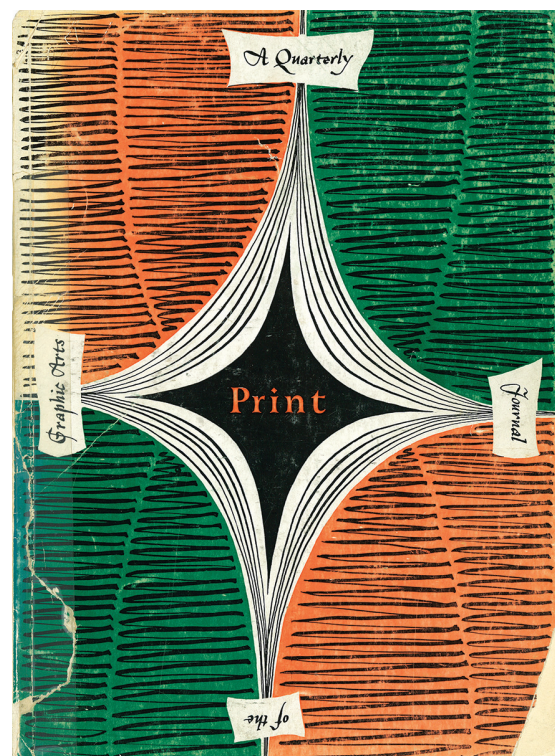
1952 Issue 3



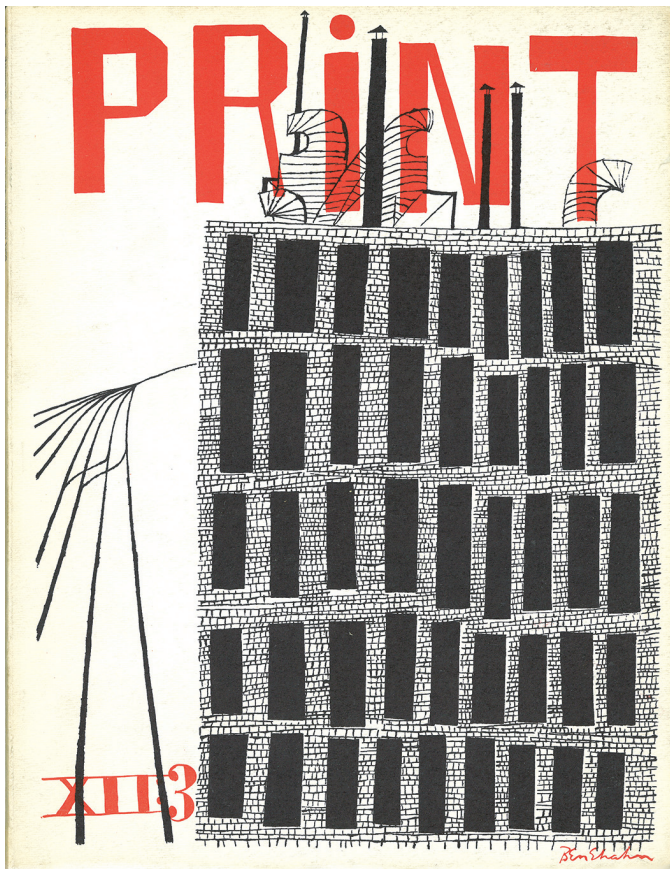
1948 Issue 2



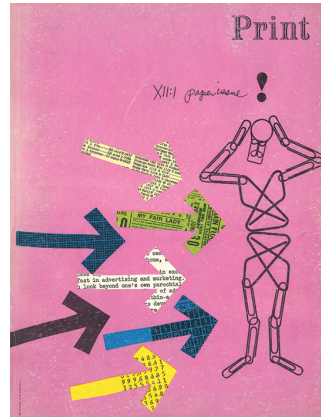
1953 Issue 3



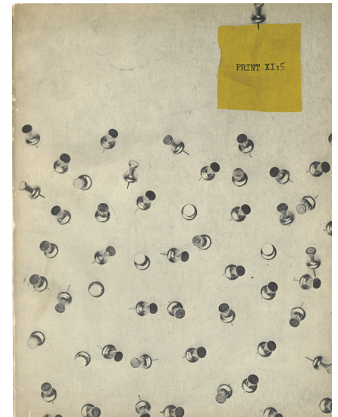
1949 Issue 2



1958 Issue 3



1958 Issue 1



1958 Issue 5

To be anointed in **Print** was verification and validation—a *Good Design*keeping Seal of Approval.



1962 Issue 2



1961 Issue 2



1967 Issue 6



1967 Issue 1



1965 Issue 3

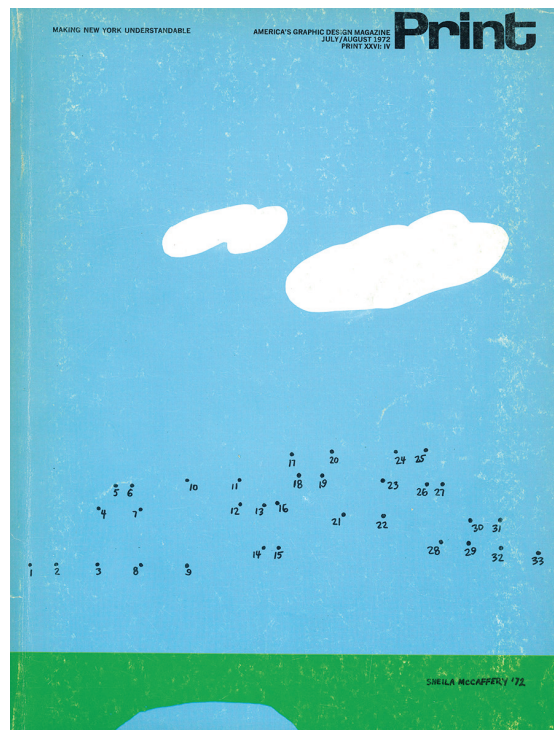
Catholic in his tastes yet allowed his sub-editors to follow their own passions and prejudices. Editors who followed in his footsteps brought their respective personalities yet stayed true to the broad scope that Fox had pioneered.

Rarely was I privy to the design of *Print*. As far as I was concerned, Rumpelstiltskin came in at night and wove it together. I was not always completely fond of what I saw, either. But I was always thrilled to receive it. It was a special day—a birthday or Christmas. Each new number brought with it a wealth of inspiration. Of course, it was a treat (most of the time) to see and reread my own articles, but I took pleasure in all the other points of view—even those that I did not agree with. The rich range of subject matter is what situated the magazine into its own genre of design coverage. Even before I joined up, stories on diversity and women's issues would run in addition to portfolios and showcases of interesting artists and designers. *Print* covered the role of designers and the environment, how propaganda succeeded and failed, design in other lands and a whole lot more. Even these seem to have become standard fare on most design websites and blogs today, but *Print* was taking chances when these concerns were first aired. Advertisers and readers often balked at anything that wasn't purely about contemporary graphic design.

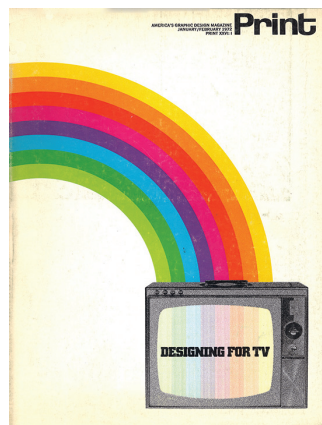
Print fostered a robust interest in design history. My historical obsessions found a happy home, but I was not alone. Arguably, alongside contributions by Philip B. Meggs and others, the design history movement flourished in *Print*'s pages. But the magazine was not purely serious; humor, even self-mockery, was routine. With Paula Scher, I edited one of at least two self-parody issues. Among the articles was an interview with Swiss designer Anale Retentiv, who as a proponent of flush left/rag right had paroxysms of madness when anyone did flush right/rag left. *Print* was serious about design but tried not to take itself too seriously.

I wonder whether *Print* was indeed taken seriously. Sure, it won prestigious National Magazine Awards but the design community, I believe, was all-around less interested in the thought-provoking aspect of *Print* than its coverage of the “next best” this or that. And yet, *Print*'s editors continued to find a balance in virtually every issue—an amazing feat! There was a joke around the *Print* office that I was limited to two swastika references a year. One of my obsessions was to write about fascist design and that, believed former publisher Howard Cadell, was a downer. So he kept count of my references to this theme. Although I was told to limit this part of my portfolio, no one actually stopped me. Words are not as dangerous as deeds. Never did *Print*'s editors try to censor me in any way. They may have drilled down with the editing—which could sometimes be annoying—but instead of stifling expression it was to make mine better. I could not have asked for more capable and engaged editors.

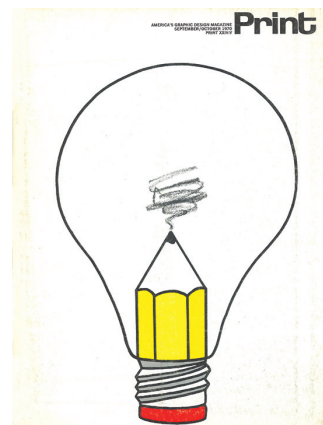
My basic memories of *Print* are fairly simple. It was a fruitful environment for me but not without moments of conflict over specific stories, layouts, images and more. But it was a wonderful environment to pitch stories and see them come to life. Among those stories was the introduction of new illustra-



1972 Issue 4



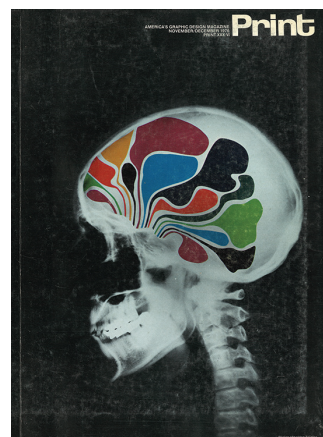
1972 Issue 1



1970 Issue 5



1975 Issue 5



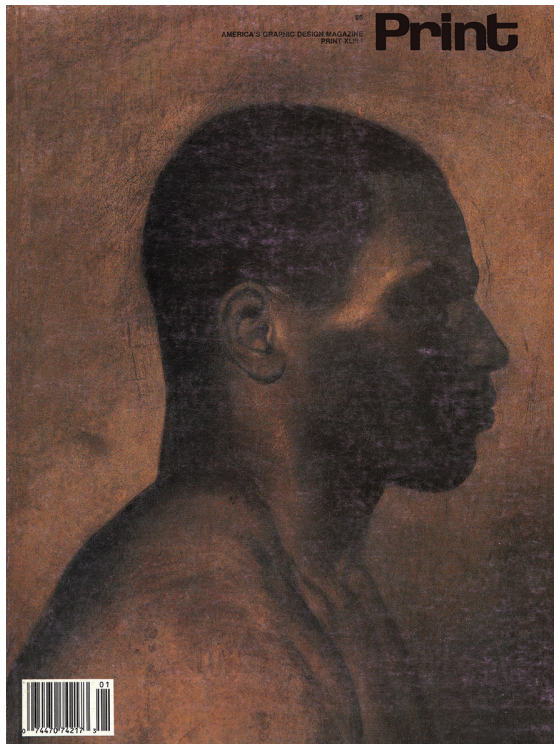
1976 Issue 6



1984 Issue 5



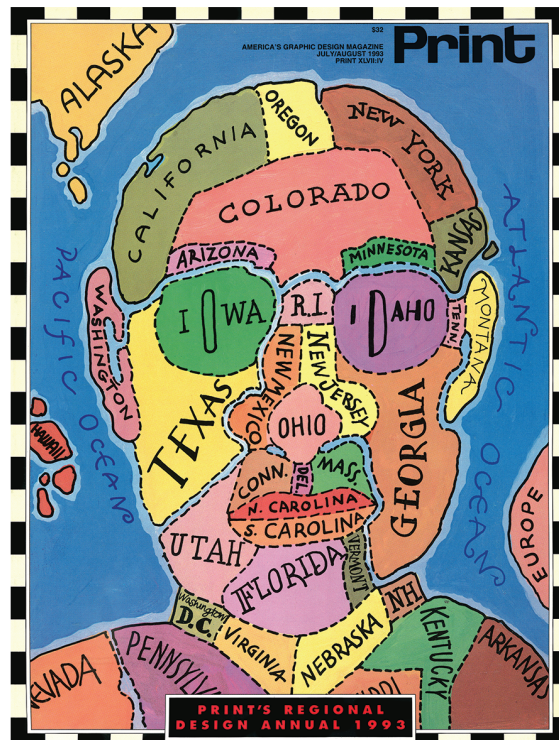
1988 Issue 5



1989 Issue 1



1984 Issue 3



1993 Issue 4

Print is dead but it's not buried. From now on it will be online only, which is already the home of many newspapers and magazines—underscore many.

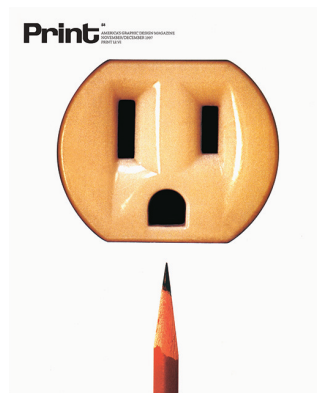
tors and designers to the *Print* fold. I recall how self-satisfied I was when my articles, such as those on Henrik Drescher, Matt Mahurin and Gottfried Helnwein, made their way to becoming cover stories. I recall convincing the editors to publish an entire issue that I guest-edited on designer and illustrator sketchbooks. Still, my own contributions were equaled and bettered by others. Bringing on columnists Rick Poynor, Meggs and Ralph Caplan, for example, was inspired editorship.

Print is dead but it's not buried. From now on it will be online only, which is already the home of many newspapers and magazines—underscore *many*. I've published *The Daily Heller* on the *Print* site for years, since Joyce Rutter Kaye was editor. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy it and am privileged to reach a sizable audience. But it is not print. Digital media is fun, exciting, responsive and fast, but the contemplative experience that comes with engaging in a print publication is a million times more engaging. I anticipated this moment of transition but I still haven't accepted the idea that I'll never see it on a newsstand again, smell its inky pages or open up the mail and remove a new issue from its shrink-wrap. It's like breaking up—or worse, losing a loved one. If you haven't done it already, you really don't know what you are missing. If you have ... well, the inevitable is now present. Get ready for the future. It will be here before you know it. ■

Steven Heller is the co-chair of the MFA Design/Designer as Author + Entrepreneur program at School of Visual Arts, and the author of nearly 200 books. He is an AIGA medalist and received the 2011 Smithsonian Institution National Design Award for "Design Mind."



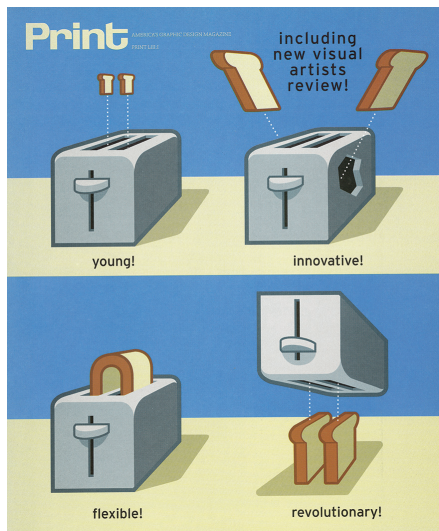
1995 Issue 3



1997 Issue 6



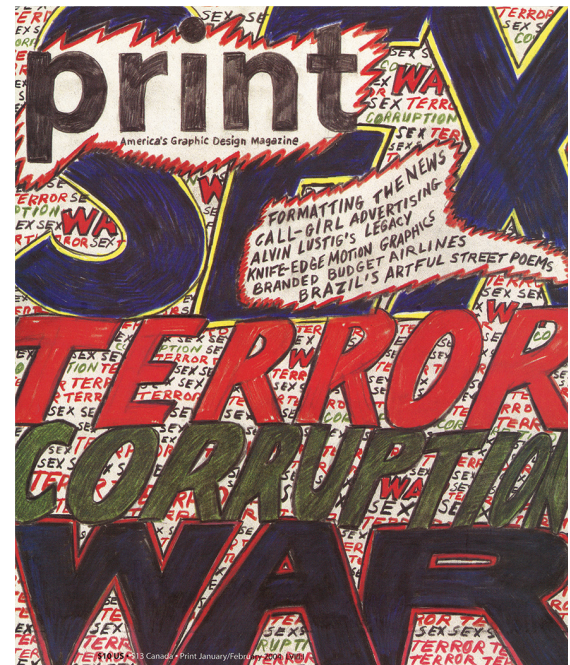
1999 Issue 3



1999 Issue 1



2002 Issue 3



2004 Issue 1

To see all (!) of *Print*'s covers from its entire run and more retrospective content, visit www.printmag.com/winter-2017-2018.