Award Catalogs

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In 1989, the Swiss Federal Office of Culture (SFOC) published the first catalogs for the most important design competition in the country, the Swiss Design Awards (SDA). This concise publication listed the winners, showed a few images of their work, and provided their CV or a short description of them. [Fig. 46] Until 2000, the SFOC maintained a similar editorial approach. It was akin to the design competition catalogs of other countries, such as the International Biennale of Graphic Design Brno. [Fig. 47] By comparison, the 2002 SDA catalog could not have been more different. The brief to the catalog designers, a new, Zurich-based graphic design studio called Elektrosmog, explained that the SFOC intended to create a publication offering a “critical discussion of [. . .] design in Switzerland.”1 The publication’s name itself provided the program: entitled Swiss Design 2002, it inferred that its contents would provide a full overview of the Swiss design scene, even though there were only twenty-four winning projects in the publication. By presenting it as such, the SFOC sent the message that the SDA were the place to be. It was an attempt at strengthening the awards, the relevance, representativity, and quality of which had meanwhile been questioned.2 A keystone of this strategy was the use of a visual language that enhanced the “hype.”3 The brief to the designers took the publication Benzin from 2000 as a point of reference.4 [Fig. 48] Like the SDA publications, Benzin also showed a selection of young Swiss graphic designers. But unlike other design catalogs, its layout was also a space for experimentation that had an impact on the Swiss design scene.5

The design of Swiss Design 2002 was used to create an added layer of discourse around the awards. The book opened with photographs reproducing the dossiers, presenting them like pieces of evidence. [Fig. 49] This directly echoed the jury process, during which dossiers are laid out on tables for the jury to assess. [Fig. 50] Seven visually varied sections followed, and provided extensive context. “Questions and answers,” a graphically diverse collage composed from interviews, delivered “witnesses’ accounts” in a design that prioritized style over legibility. [Figs. 51, 52, 53] “Diagrams and statistics” provided a humorous take on the dichotomy between hard facts and soft delivery. [Fig. 54] “Texts” was where the “procurer and the barristers” made their case, though the series of images interspersing the essays also introduced a lighter tone. [Fig. 55] The formidable grand jury was depicted in a stern formation, delivering its verdict. [Fig. 56] This was followed by an overview photograph of each winner’s dossier, accompanied by the jury’s comments that aimed at justifying the choice of winners.

Swiss Design 2002 was a luxurious publication, with CHF 55,000 earmarked just for the production of the book (prepress and printing). On top of the designers’ fee of CHF 35,000, a further CHF 17,000 was allocated for art direction—including illustrations, experiments, maps, and photography. The publication thus became just as much a celebration of graphic design as of the SDA winners themselves. However, in the eyes of a reader accustomed to classic exhibition catalogs, Swiss Design 2002 might have come across as a waste of paper. Strictly speaking, it was not a documentation of the exhibition and did not feature a classic plates section with descriptive captions. Arguably, however, this had never been the SFOC’s intention.

Instead, the catalog developed a critical discourse via the means of graphic design. It provided a new, subtle example of what a design book about design could be. By reproducing Swiss Design 2002 in the present publication, we add a further layer in the meta-narrative that Elektrosmog conceived. But this was not just an exercise in style. The design was used to secure a favorable reception on the scene by creating a “must-have” publication. In other words, it was not aimed at a general audience, nor even at an audience interested in classic exhibition catalogs. The SDA made no effort to appeal to so-called commer-
cial or advertising studios, or well-established designers. Their goal was to attract a younger generation interested in experimental design. As a byproduct of this intention, a feedback loop of design promotion was created. Many designers who were awarded went on to play a defining role in federal design promotion by being commissioned by the SFOC for publications, by their later presence on various juries, and by being assigned advisory roles. The SDA were no longer a passive observer of the scene: instead, they became an actor with a defining impact on designers’ careers, and *Swiss Design 2002* was the Trojan Horse of that strategy.

1 Crivelli 2002a: 2.
3 Crivelli 2002a: 3.
4 Ibid.
5 See “Blogpost,” in the present volume.
Fig. 46  Swiss Design Awards exhibition catalog presenting the work of Maria Arnold, 1989.
Fig. 47 Spread of catalog, *International Biennale of Graphic Design Brno*, 2002.
Fig. 48  Presentation of the work of the graphic design studio NORM in the publication *Benzin: Young Swiss Graphic Design*, 2000.
Fig. 49  First section of the Swiss Design Awards catalog showing awardees’ submissions (left: Gilles Gavillet, right: Isabel Truniger), 2002.
Fig. 50  Documentation photograph of the Swiss Design Awards judging process (here, Gilles Gavillet’s submission), anonymous photographer, Bern, Feb. 18, 2002.
Fig. 51 Interviews with designers in the Swiss Design Awards catalog, 2002.
denke, das war eine Eingebung, ein Blitzgedanke. — SIMONE LÜLING Ich suche nach... als die materielle Form. — ANNE CRAUSAZ Mon futur? Mystère et boule de gomme! C'est d'une voyante extra-lucide). — MARIA PLA MARÀBLE Unsere Produkte sind für ein 'Liebe... dem Weg interessiert mich viel stärker als die Frage nach dem Wohin. — HEN PFUTZER... ist aber mein Stil, die Leute zu irritieren, ohne aufdringlich zu werden. — RAPHAEL verfeinert sich kontinuierlich. Eine dritte Maschinenreihe legt sich über Europa und... FERRARI — ALAIN RAPPAPORT Über einen längeren Zeitraum mit einem Regisseur... fnen von meinen Ideen und von freien Arbeiten. Das ist immer ein bisschen ein... freu bleiben möchte. Das kann aber bedeuten, dass ich in zehn Jahren Serviceange... Realisieren von konzeptionellen Arbeiten. Die Thematik einer Kleinkollektion ist... nen, immer erfolgreich wäre, würden es mehr Leute probieren. Es ist toll, wenn... Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est plus le jeu entre les images que l'influence de Sergio Leone, qui transforme le genre western en conte mythologique. — RAPHAEL... riempie quasi completamente la mia vita, grazie alla passione per la fotografia... — CHRISTOPH ZELLWEGER Mir geht es auch um die Frage, wann der 'designate', also derjenige... meiner Arbeit wichtig sind für mich, bezeichne ich als kleine Helden – große Helden von Schrift. Die Stimme/die Körper transportieren den Ausdruck eines Gedankengutes, Bekanntschaften? Freunde, die du siehst, manche mehr, manche weniger, im... Stadt gehe, gibt’s halt andere Leute, die du dann mehr siehst, mit einigen arbeitest du das Gefühl haben zu stagnieren. Immer noch Spass und Freude an der Arbeit habe... Das Beziehungsnetz ist eigentlich relativ gross, da ich mich, je nach A... — ISABEL TRÜNGLER Ein ‘gutes’, spannendes Portrait hat für mich... — ISABEL TRÜNGLER Ich brauche das Geld, um für 2-3 Monate keine Aufträge mehr zu nehmen. ‘Vorbilder’ ist ja ein recht weites Feld. Es gibt welche, die haben gute Schrift... — CHRISTIAN H. REI Karl Lagerfeld von ‘Comme des Garçons’ oder Martin Margiela. — CHRISTOPH ZELLWEGER Kollaborationen mit verschiedenen Kulturen und Menschen. — CHRISTOPH ZELLWEGER Leip... mit denお互い... SCHELONWERSCHER Bof. — ANNE CRAUSAZ Oui, mes parents comprennent... — ALAIN RAPPAPORT Ich stelle mir vor, mein Tätigkeitsgebiet in Goldene... — ALAIN RAPPAPORT Ich stelle mir vor, mein Tätigkeit... et les plus importantes en professionnel: les discussions avec mes deux collègues [chef d'équipe, chef de projet], un... — CHRISTIAN H. REI Mein Vater [...] In einem persönlichen Gespräch mit ihm habe ich aber gehört, dass er von seinen Ideen und von den Menschen, die etwas geben, die kritisch und wi...
Fig. 52 A list of awardees’ models in the Swiss Design Awards catalog, 2002.
Fig. 53 Left: essay discussing designers’ self-perception; right: awardees’ preferred tools in the Swiss Design Awards catalog, 2002.
Fig. 54 Overview of prize distribution since 1923, illustrated by Bastien Aubry in the Swiss Design Awards catalog, 2002.
Fig. 55 Essay interspersed with humorous trophies in the Swiss Design Awards catalog, 2002.
Fig. 56 The “grand jury” formed by the Swiss Federal Design Commission and external experts, as presented in the Swiss Design Awards catalog, 2002.