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## Ursprung und internationale Verbreitung der Schweizer Grafik

Dorothea Hofmann  
**The Birth of a Style.**  
**The Influence of the Basel Educational Model on Swiss Graphic Design**

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Ebenfalls lieferbar (2016)  
**Die Geburt eines Stils.**  
**Der Einfluss des Basler Ausbildungsmodells auf die Schweizer Grafik**

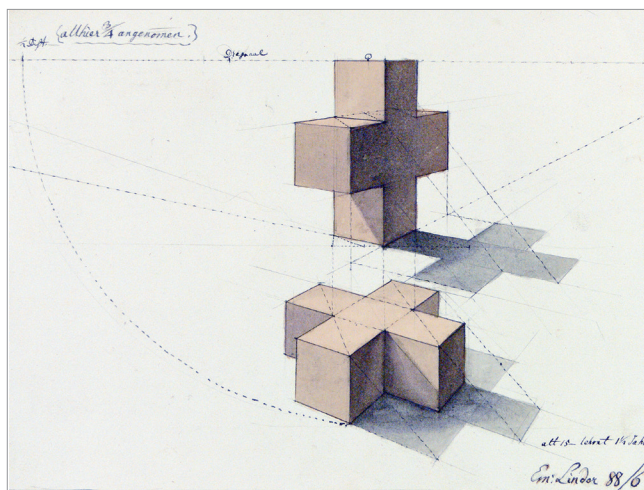
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Der Schweizer Grafik gelang es in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts über die Landesgrenzen hinaus für Aufsehen zu sorgen. Swiss Design und Swiss Style wurden international zum anerkannten Gütesiegel für qualitativ wegweisendes Grafikdesign, das mit Präzision, Sachlichkeit und Reduktion eine ganze Epoche visuell prägte – und mit innovativen Arbeiten zu einem Schweizer Exportschlager wurde.

Das Basler Ausbildungsmodell der Allgemeinen Gewerbeschule, später Schule für Gestaltung, war ein wichtiger Wegbereiter für den internationalen Durchbruch der neuen Schweizer Grafik. Strenge, aber undogmatische Ansichten, eine pragmatische Haltung Gestaltungsfragen gegenüber, Mut zum Experiment und ein klares Bekenntnis zur Moderne lösten von Basel aus eine breite grafische Bewegung aus, welche von Europa bis in die USA reicht.

Dorothea Hofmann erzählt die Geschichte der Schweizer Grafik aus einer neuen Perspektive. Indem sie den Fokus bewusst auf Basel legt, zeichnet sie das differenzierte Bild einer nationalen Grafikbewegung, welche in ihrer Vielschichtigkeit das enge Korsett der Zürcher konstruktiv-konkreten Richtung sprengt, mit welcher der Swiss Style bis heute gemeinhin gleichgesetzt wird.

Im Zentrum des Buchs stehen ehemalige Lehrer und Schüler der Allgemeinen Gewerbeschule Basel, die mit ihren Arbeiten zur internationalen Reputation des Swiss Design massgeblich beigetragen haben: Hermann Eidenbenz, Emil Ruder, Armin Hofmann, Karl Gerstner, Gérard Ifert, Nelly Rudin, Pierre Mendell, Wolfgang Weingart, Kenneth Hiebert, Dan Friedman, April Greiman und viele mehr.



## Über die Autorin

Dorothea Hofmann (1929–2023) liess sich in den 1940er- und 50er-Jahren an der Allgemeinen Gewerbeschule Basel zur Grafikerin ausbilden. Sie war eine der ersten Studentinnen, die das berühmte Basler Ausbildungsmodell durchliefen und kennt die wichtigsten Protagonisten des Swiss Design und Swiss Style persönlich.

Sie unternahm zahlreiche Weiterbildungsreisen nach Italien, Spanien, Frankreich, Holland, Mexiko, Guatemala, Ägypten, Indien und in die USA. Lehraufträge führen sie unter anderem an die Yale University School of Art, die New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture, ans Atlanta College of Art, ans Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Oaxaca in Mexiko und ans National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad in Indien. Zahlreiche Ausstellungen im In- und Ausland.

Dorothea Hofmann war über 60 Jahre mit Armin Hofmann verheiratet, sie lebten in Luzern.



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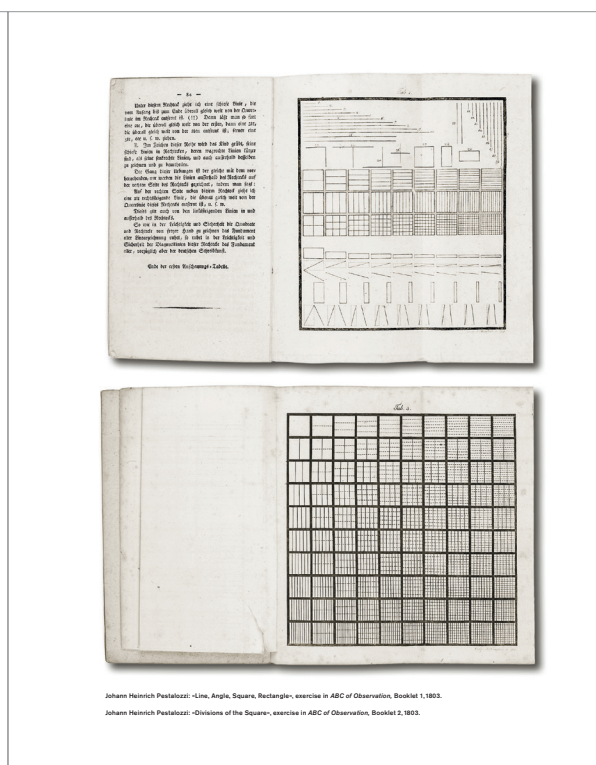
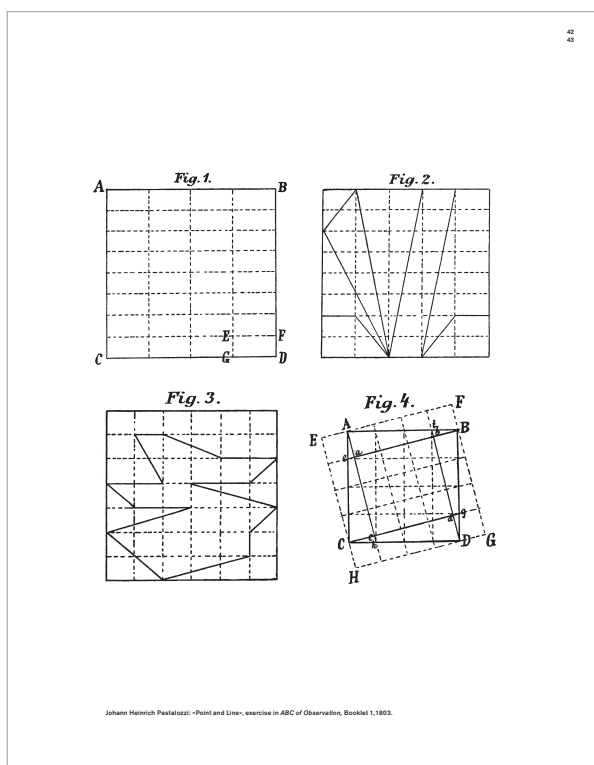
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**Multiplicity  
of Styles**

The terms *Swiss Graphic Design* and *Swiss Style* are catch-all designations that have been in use since Switzerland emerged as a beacon of modernism for English-speaking audiences and readers. This chapter is an overview of five directions that define the genre of the «Schweizer Grafik». The German term implies nuances beyond its literal translation «Swiss Graphics».

The period begins just after the turn of the twentieth century, when social upheaval throughout Europe as reflected in art, design and related fields, triggers a new worldview teeming with unprecedented fervor. Within Switzerland, interdisciplinary teaching, faculty exchanges, international communication, travel and study abroad, pave the way for an eruption of contrary viewpoints and a multiplicity of visual styles. This pluralism, however, is underpinned by a common thread: the educational concepts and curricula firmly rooted in Switzerland have incubated during previous decades.

*«It is a distinguishing feature of twentieth-century art that a uniform style does not predominate over individual movements, but rather that different, often contradictory stylistic concepts coexist – realistic and abstract, constructive and expressive, rational and idealistic...»*

Willy Rotzler, Fritz Schärer, Karl Wobmann: *Das Plakat in der Schweiz*, 1990.

Although this complex development of antithetical concepts and multiplicity of styles can be understood by comparing independent design directions, taken together they reveal the core of the Schweizer Grafik, trace its development and contextualize its diversity.

3.4 Five Directions of the «Schweizer Grafik»

The Basel School

The five directions of the Schweizer Grafik, individually described in the sections to follow, eventually influence each other, mainly through teachers and personal contacts between the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich and the Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel.

- The Basel School
- Young Generation
- The School of Ernst Keller
- Photography in Zurich:
- Hans Finsler's Photography Course
- Herbert Matter's Photomontage
- Concrete Artists

Formal and stylistic characteristics in graphic design parallel the history of fine art and architecture with one conspicuous distinction which is the application of letterform. Each direction of the Schweizer Grafik integrates letters in varying ways as an element of design: as straightforward text for information, in combination with an image, as a self-referential character (the single letter or number), or as a word-image. The more «realistic» orientation of **The Basel School** results in a completely different expression compared to **The School of Ernst Keller** in Zurich, where the use of hand-drawn lettering predominates. The **Young Generation** in Basel, emphasizing the abstract combination of type and image, can be contrasted with **Hans Finsler's Photography Course** in Zurich, where the form of the object and its materiality dominate.

**Herbert Matter's Photomontage** is unique; his overlapping imagery is anchored by words or titles, which define the degree of foreground and background tension. Finally, the **Concrete Artists** (differentiated from the abstract artists) use type essentially for information with an overriding preference for sanserif typefaces.

**The Basel School**

The direction of the Basel School begins with the founding of the Fachklasse für angewandte Kunst at the Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel in 1915. The painter, graphic artist and poster designer, Niklaus Stöcklin plays a central role in this development and will also shape the graphic direction of the Young Generation. Stöcklin, a former pupil of Burkhard Mangold, is regarded as a cofounder and a leading Swiss representative of Neue Sachlichkeit and Magic Realism. The latter is an art movement that, unlike Expressionism or Abstract Art, does not reject realism in painting. Magic Realism exaggerates the mundane through its fidelity to detail, thereby bestowing a supernatural effect. Whereas the poster art of Burkhard Mangold still shows traces of Art Nouveau, Stöcklin's work shows



3.4 Five Directions of the «Schweizer Grafik»

Young Generation

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**Young Generation**

At the beginning of the 1920s, a vibrant young designers' collective commits to a new dynamic in graphic design and typography. The Young Generation is an offshoot of the Basel School that will significantly impact the Schweizer Grafik.

The designers of this direction are linked to the Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel through their training and work but they form a countermovement to the meticulous rendering of objects characteristic of the Basel School. Simplification of form and clear objective typography replace detail and complexity. Among others, the Young Generation includes Helene Haasbauer-Wallrath (1885), Robert Stücklin (1889), Niklaus Stöcklin (1896), Ernst Mumenthaler (1901), Theo Ballmer (1902) and Ernst Keiser (1894), founder and director of the *Basler Werkstätten für Kunst und Gewerbe* [Basel workshops for arts and crafts].

The works of the Young Generation set a precedent for the design of rigorous type forms. Helene Haasbauer-Wallrath, for example, born in Basel, attends various courses at the Allgemeine Gewerbeschule and studies under lettering artist Rudolf von Larisch in Austria. Influenced by von Larisch's turn-of-the-century viewpoint that emphasizes the graphic impact of rhythm in letter design, Haasbauer-Wallrath designs block letters, or sanserif capitals, especially created for her posters.

Robert Stücklin is known for posters with large-format letters and numbers cut in linoleum. Through his teaching at the Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel, he influences the entire following generation. Niklaus Stöcklin's autodidactic background in the art of lettering is augmented by his studies in Basel, where he learns to draw type forms under Paul Kammüller.

© Niklaus Stöcklin: PKZ [Paul Kahl Zürich, gentleman's attire], poster, lithography, 1934.