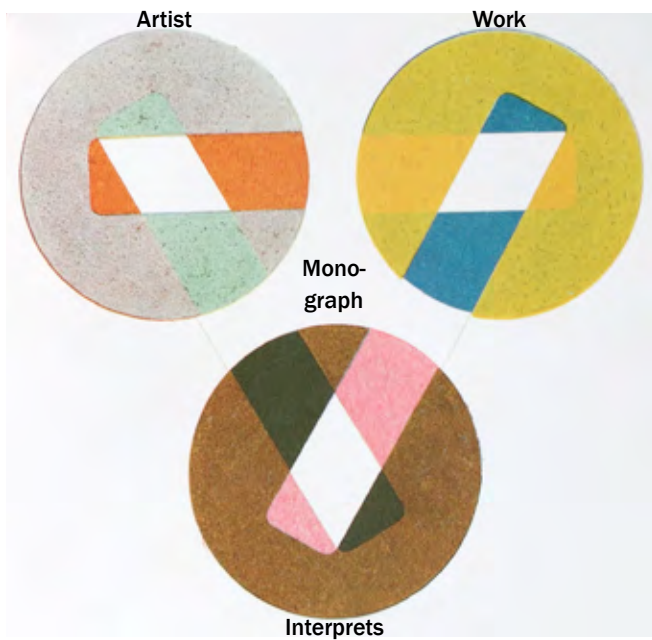


**Printed Matter in
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*On Karel
Martens and
designer-
monographs*



a One of Martens free prints, showing the relations between the artist, his work and the work of the interprets.

1 PM, imprint:
“edited by: Robin Kinross,
Jaap van Triest and Karel
Martens. design by: Jaap
van Triest with Karel
Martens.”

2 MeM, imprint:
“Beeldredactie en vorm-
geving Karel Martens
en Jaap van Triest met
medeewerking van Roger
Willems”

**3 List of designer-
books:**
Karel Martens: Printed
matter
Wim Crouwel: Mode en
module
Otto Treumann
Jost Hochuli: Drucks-
achen, vor allem Bücher
Recollected Work: Mevis
and van Deursen
Sandberg: Designer and
director of the Stedelijk
Jan van Toorn: Critical
Practice
BOOM: Biography in
books
Otl Aicher, Gestalter
Full Color
Walter Nikkels: depicted
abgebildet afgebleed
Jurriaan Schrofer



Two books lay on the table. Their formal similarities: format, softcovers and width of spine. Their subject: a designer–personality — represented in biographic texts and the reproduction of their work. Both books are designed (interpreted) by Jaap van Triest and Karel Martens. The designer–personalities (artists) the books honour are Wim Crouwel and Karel Martens himself.

Karel Martens — Printed Matter/Drukwerk, 1996/2001/2010, Hyphen Press¹

Wim Crouwel — Mode en Module, 1997, NAI 010²

There is a certain fascination within the designer–monograph. The oeuvre of a graphic designer is manifested in the graphic designer's primary medium: the book. Comparable to a painting that portrays a painter, a movie about a director, or a novel dedicated to a novelist — the fusion of subject and object seems to embody a certain truth.

- a The monograph must be seen as a result of the intersection of the artist's life, his work and the interpretation of it through the bookmakers (publishers, writers, editors, designers). Every monograph is a result of different such constellations.

There is a connection between the artist and his work, a connection between the artist and his interpret and a connection between the style of the artist and the style of the interpret. These connections build the framework of the monograph. So if we approach the oeuvre of a designer through his monograph we will only see a restricted part of the whole. We see the artist and his work through the eyes of the the interprets.

Of a selection of books³ on the oeuvre of designers I chose the two books centered around Karel Martens for a closer investigation. First of all in hope for a better comparability. Secondly because Karel Martens is a designer whom I do not know as a teacher, but whose work and person have emerged throughout my entire studies. It felt like I could approach him out of a certain distance, simply through what his books communicate. Finally because I appreciate the attitude behind his work: it is modern but rather lively than cold. His modernism leaves space for 'out of grid' decisions. It is musical, but with the intuition of jazz, not the stringency of 12-tone-music. It isn't concept-based, it is purely visual, but still manages not to be boring or dull. He knows the rules of typography, but he has the casualness to forget them. On the other hand it is evident that his outcome has a strong personal fingerprint. He can easily be accused of being a one-trick-pony.

But let's have a look at the books. Starting with Printed Matter, not only because it is released first, also because the reflection of the book about Karel Martens designed by Karel Martens offers an interesting point of departure: The aspect of self-representation. How does the designer position himself? How does this position apply visually throughout layout and editing?

Karel Martens — Printed Matter

PM was released "on the occasion of the award of the Dr. A. H. Heineken price for art"⁴ which Karel Martens received in 1996. The jury's introduction connects Martens' work to workmanship, simplicity and non-glamour. It is described as exciting undertakings, meticulous and demanding for quality. Bottom line: Martens is "...a rock in the sometimes all-too-fashionable graphic racket"⁵. After the introduction comes a biographical text by Robin Kinross illustrated by greyscale pictures. On page 30 the chronologic image part starts with a book-cover from 1960 for his first client Van Loghum Slaterus.

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4–5 **PM**, p.3–4, 'Report of the jury of the Dr. A. H. Heineken Prize for Art', 1996

6 **PM**, p.192–197, 'Karel Martens and education', interview by Michael Cina, 2005

7 **IDEA Mag** 344, 2011, interview by Emily King

8–9 **PM**, p.189–191, 'Karel Martens: meticulous and personal', by Hugues C. Boekraad, Judges' Report, H.N. Werkman Prize, 1993

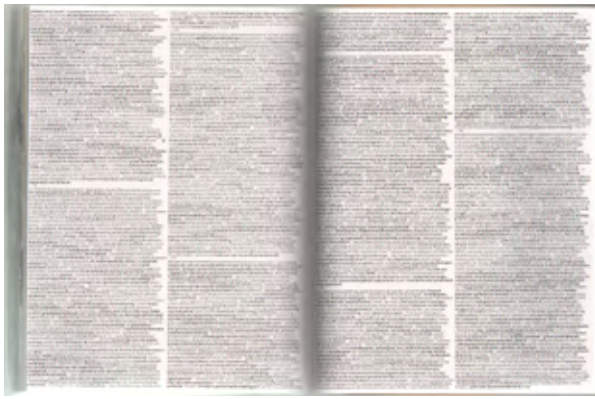
Hundreds of reproduced works follow ending in 2010 (page 180) with a poster for the 21st Chaumont graphic design festival. A collection of several short texts follows. A record of works, a biographic list and a record of literature finish off the book (page 208).

- d The centerpiece of his monograph is the image–section, where his work is shown. It is characterized by a loose grid, the combination of heterogeneous imagery (without the attempt to force them into homogeneity) and sizes from microscopical to full spread bleeds. Those decisions manage to keep tension. On every spread something unique and surprising happens. It stays dynamic, momentary and ungraspable. Book–covers get scaled down to the size of a stamp, their spines to the size of a fingertip. Sketches confront results, commissioned works confront free prints, captions get part of the image–spectacle. Things impose on each other, mesh and intersect. The result is a rush of imagery which manages to not lose itself. The reader is not guided, he is invited to dive into this world and it's up to him which images he wants to stay on and which he skips.
- e This loose treatment of images gives Martens also the space to react on each depicted project individually and to give it the representation, the stage, he considers best. A good example among others, is the newspaper 'Nederlandse Staatscourant' (p. 143). He blows it up to full bleed and turns it 90 degree counterclockwise. This way the title–page of the newspaper runs over two pages, divided by the Japanese fold. A sculptural quality is created which derives from the newspaper itself, which is usually delivered with a horizontal fold, in order to have a handier format.

To clarify the question of how the designer sees, stages and positions himself I decided to examine the photographic portraits that are shown in the monograph. They seem to tell a lot about the personality of the designer as whole. Martens said: "I believe that the work mirrors someone's way of living. So my personal life should also affect my work."⁶ PM includes only 12 pictures that show Karel Martens. They are spread throughout the book and most of them in a very small size — one really has to look out for them. The smallest shows him looking at a print through a magnifying glass

- g (11·16 mm). Other pictures in increasing size show him working, teaching, installing his work, pausing in an espresso bar, surrounded by students and at the prize–giving of the Heineken prize. The biggest picture (110·165 mm) is in the end of the book; it
- f shows him and his wife. They both look into the camera, which differentiates it from all the earlier pictures that appear as documenting snapshots. It is the only staged photo, the one portrait that is supposed to show the designer in the book. They are sitting in front of their house at two opposite edges of a table. On both sides of the table stand a glass of beer besides an empty Heineken bottle. One thinks of the deserved beer after a long day of labour. The book is at his end and the work is done. It remains: the life of a laborer and that of a family man. The amount and size of the pictures, their casualness as snapshot is evidence of a quite modest way of self–representation. He was never employed or organized in unions, he never went for business. "No, I just did my design. I never had the desire to work on big corporate identities with big demanding clients."⁷ He stayed small–scale and somewhat withdrawn and humble. "The respect he enjoys among fellow designers is great, but he is too introvert ever to be a protagonist. He demonstrates an identity, not a program."⁸

How does this image of the modest craftsman apply in PM? The cover's wrapping paper, the lightness of the softcover and the economy of the format (deriving from the offset printing machine, a 70·50 cm sheet, three times folded) head in this direction. They are unpretentious decisions. The avoidance of white in order to dispense with margins (text runs up to 1 mm to the page–borders, pictures end exactly on the kink of the folded pages) speak to



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10 PM, p.187-189, 'Martens' capture of the margin', by Koosje Siermann, first published in NRC Handelsblad, 1993

11 Werkplaats Typografie, 2003, interview by Corina Cotorobai

12 Étapes design and visual culture, edition #21, september 2010, interview by Harmen Liemburg

h this as well. The boldness of the small sized font (Monotype Grotesque 216 bold extended in about 8 pt for main text, 5 pt for additions) gives a characteristic image, but doesn't necessarily wants to be read (particularly visible in the record of works, where the typography gets so dense, that it is more attractive as an image than as a text). The long and rich image-section invites to get lost in, but doesn't present Martens' work from top to bottom. He says of himself that he is a man of the images, not of words, and that he wanted to avoid dogmatism all his life long. All the design decisions mentioned seem to fit his persona, but there are also contradictions. As modest the body and format of the book may be, the Japanese binding is complicated and difficult, with a 50 % waste of paper, because every book-page is a fold of two sheets. The same goes for the non-existing margins. As casual as this gesture seems on the surface, as complicated it is to execute for the printer. That turns its casualness into a surplus.

A detail which caught my attention within the book is some interventions that are left without a caption. There is a small rusty paint-container, an ancient portrait of a man, the already mentioned beers in the portrait are emphasized by a black outlined circle and the picture of three children opposite a biographic list. Hugues C. Boekraad said that "Martens will grasp chance circumstances with both hands and he is happy to play little jokes"⁹. It is these jokes that keep his monograph lively. They are the 'out of grid' decisions I mentioned earlier.

- i The paint container that's printed into the spine of page 13 finds explanation in a text in the end: "Asked about his favourite works of printing, he passes over all the classic and mundane masterworks, from the Poliphilus up to the telephone book of Wim Crouwel ... to arrive at: ... a half-rusted tin of transparent furniture lacquer, fished years ago out of a pool of water, Swiss and lettered with the inscription 'Clou L4 für Heimwerker'"¹⁰. He gives a stage to what most people would regard as trash.
- j The etched portrait led me into a trap. First I suggested the profile of Aldus Manutius (1449†1515), the Italian printer who originally printed and published the Poliphilus in 1499. I suspected the portrait could be an honour to Martens' secret traditional idol — which made sense when we hear him say: "I have a great respect for the tradition. But I have also a belief, coming from the modernists, that every generation has to find new rules, new techniques valid for their time."¹¹ Or in another interview: "Look, design, or maybe life itself is about questioning the traditions. If you're making a book-cover you have to relate to all book-covers that have been made before."¹² But as a matter of fact the portrait shows the profile of Italian philosopher
- k Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463†1494) and is related to a book depicted on the following page. A misinterpretation that is due to the rush of information in PM, but of which I think Martens would have fun with. He likes to trick people, to show that there is not only one way.
- m The circled beers on the table probably do have good reasons. Heineken is the brewery that sponsored the award which made this book possible. A small gesture of gratitude.
- n Finally, next to the list of his professional achievements he puts a picture of his children. He rates his children and his career as an equal. It says again that work and family is for him of the same importance.

I said that these little plays add liveliness to Printed Matter. A fundamental aspect of the monograph is time. It is usually released at the very end of a career or even posthumously. That gives it a serious note. It is a manifestation of the work and life of a designer, it is what will stay after he passes. Quite often this gets translated with monumentality. What is shown is out of question, manifest, motionless. Those books tend to turn into 'gravestones', threaten to overwhelm the reader. But not only the reader, a monograph of this kind also encloses a career.

The jury of the Heineken price of Art said in their report: " ... the jury decided on making a choice from the generation that is still 'in media res' of designing, and to find one of those who have build

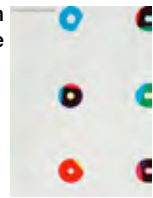


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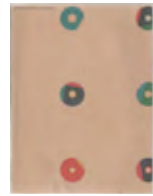


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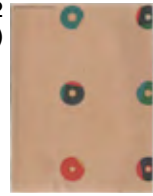
1996 Special edition
for Heineken Price



1996 Edition 1



2001 Edition 2
(revised and extended)



2010 Edition 3
(revised and extended)



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13,14 Étapes design
and visual culture, edi-
tion #21, September 2010,
interview by Harmen
Liemburg
15 Typography papers,
2005, 'Wim Crouwel:
mode en module: a re-
view', by Robin Kinross
16 MeM, p.5, 'Voor-
woord', by Frederike
Huygen
17 MeM, p. 204,
'Oeuvrelijst', Verantwoor-
ding

up a recognizable and personal body of work. These, with the exception of a few younger ones, are people in their 50s”¹³. Karel Martens is 57 when he is awarded with the Heineken price, as a result of which PM was released. He is as productive and vivid as ever and has not the slightest intention of retiring. His most successful phase is still to come.

- o As PM turned out to be a successful book it was re–released in updated and extended versions in 2001 and 2010 (the version we are looking at). The concept stayed the same, but the work got updated. His monograph again stays flexible and manages to grow with its artist.

In the end the impression remains that PM comes close to what Karel Martens is. Non didactic, non dogmatic, humorous, vivid, personal, individual. Of course this is very much benefiting to the fact that he was involved as his own interpret. One could speak of an auto–monography. Form and content are of the same source. (Which role Jaap van Triest exactly takes in this process is not transparent. However, Martens mentions once related to the design of PM: “You should know that this is merely to the merit of editor and designer Jaap van Triest, whose books are always full of information. Of course I contributed my time and share of energy, but the concept is Jaap’s.”¹⁴ Although I’m convinced that Jaap van Triest was the main designer behind PM, it still seems evident that every decision was done at least in consultation with Karel Martens.)

This is a very one–sided view. We perceive Martens exactly as how he wants to be perceived. This misses the chance of critique and friction that a monograph in the subjective field of visual arts could profit from. The approach of an oeuvre through the distanced eyes of a outside interpret gives space for a more open reflection. How do Martens/Van Triest adjust their position when they design Wim Crouwel’s monograph?

Wim Crouwel — Mode en Module

Mode en Module was released in 1997 on the occasion of Wim Crouwel’s retirement from the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in 1993. “In advance of this, early in 1990, Frederike Huygen... began to make plans to write and produce a book about Crouwel. It would mark his retirement, not with a simple celebration, but rather with a sophisticated and critical discussion.”¹⁵ It opens with a short preface where she says: “The authors also didn’t envision a book that would be limited to an inventory description. They strived for an analysis of the work and wanted to interpret this and put it in a broader context.”¹⁶ It follows an introduction by Hugues C. Boekraad, the second author of MeM. Now starts the critical reflection of both authors in seven chapters, illustrated with reference imagery. Ending on page 204. The ‘Oeuvrelijst’ begins with a booklet from 1947 and ends on page 397 with a poster for Kieler Woche in 1997. The last 32 pages contain several biographic lists. (428 pages in total)

- p The text– and image–part are of equal importance (both on about 200 pages). The image part is structured by a list that contains all works Crouwel ever did “The oeuvre list is initially ordered chronologically, and therein alphabetical on client and type of product.”¹⁷ About 700 of the 1.606 listed works get illustrated by homogenized image material. Mostly flattened scans, cropped out to a clear rectangular shape, with a thin outline in case the white of the reproduction meshes with the white of the page. It is a proper archive that works like a shelf in which you lay things down in the order and sizes the shelf dictates you. Spread over 200 pages the dry reproduction of Crouwel’s work has an almost demystifying effect. The reader recognizes the restricted range of design elements Crouwel repeatedly used in his work.

“When he did the posters and catalogs for the Stedelijk Museum, he was the most initiated designer of the Netherlands.”¹⁸ His work got copied because its non–individual expression makes it



18 **MeM**, p.46–56, 'De positie van Wim Crouwel', by Hugues C. Boekraad
 19 **Werkplaats Typografie**, 2003, interview by Corina Cotorobai
 20 **PM**, p.189–191, 'Karel Martens: meticulous and personal', by Hugues C. Boekraad, Judges' Report, H.N. Werkman Prize, 1993
 21 **Typography papers**, 2005, 'Wim Crouwel: mode en module: a re-

view', by Robin Kinross
 22 **MeM**, p.7, 'Inleiding', by Hugues C. Boekraad
 23 **MeM**, p.46–56, 'De positie van Wim Crouwel', by Hugues C. Boekraad
 24 **Karel Martens: weerdruk**, Lecturis Documentaires 27, 2004, 'De wereld bedrukken', by Paul Elliman
 25–27 **MeM**, p.46–56, 'De positie van Wim Crouwel', by Hugues C. Boekraad



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easy to fake. Also Martens started out with forgery: “When I was a student I was also influenced by Wim Crouwel, for example, and by the modernist approach in general. It was very fascinating for me! So I started to imitate... oh, maybe that's the wrong word. You see how it feels, and then you start looking for yourself.”¹⁹ But made it his own: “He has developed his own idiom, somewhat averted from the world. His work is not easy to imitate, nor does it invite copying. It is too idiosyncratic for that, and above all too labour intense.”²⁰

As for Martens, the closer look at the photographic portraits used in the book will bring us closer to the self-image of Wim Crouwel. Although they are collected and edited into the book by outsiders, the pictures in themselves embody a conscious self-positioning in the moment they were taken. We see the person Wim Crouwel on about 65 pictures in MeM. There are some private pictures, but mostly official press-photography. They appear as reference imagery to the texts (p.12–171) and again in the biographic list in the back from page 404–415 (some get repeated). The smallest picture (15·12mm) shows him in the robe of a university professor (bijzonder hoogleraar), the biggest pictures are two full spread images (230·350mm) showing him posing in futuristic fashion suits. “The ‘Mode’ aspect of Wim Crouwel reached an extreme when, in 1969, he modelled some unisex costumes (including shirts made of ‘space-silk’) for a magazine feature.”²¹ He appears on a wedding picture, lecturing and discussing on podiums, teaching in front of a crowd of students, in the office of Total Design at the desk or on the phone or on a group-portrait with his employees. We see him on openings and galas, in a race-car and in the mentioned fashion feature. Except for a few pictures they all seem quite official and taken under aware circumstances. In most images Wim Crouwel is suited up, wears a tie, or bow-tie. The most casual, but still extravagant outfits are a leatherjacket, a black turtleneck and the fashion suits. It seems as if he is never entirely private, he always represents a role: the professor, the director, the teacher, the boss, the model, the father even. A picture with his daughter Gili in 1992 shows him in this classical 90s family-photographer studio, with a hand-painted background, a staged ‘casual’ pose and an artificial cheerful smile. In the preface Huygen writes: “The structure of this book is based on a same division between person and life on the one hand, and the œuvre on the other.”²² Both seem characterized by hierarchy, status, representation, professionalism, straightness and flawlessness. “Crouwel is pre-eminently being identified with terms like organization and clarity. (...) He is (being) associated with the Dutch Calvinism: work ethic, frugality and endurance.”²³

How does Martens interpret Crouwel’s position? And how does it react with his own?

Crouwel and Martens identify themselves as modernists. They have the same ideological frame, but their conception of modernism is a different. While Martens sees modernism as a personal way of living, Crouwel sees it as an universal, and official one. Martens says: “I want to work in the same language in which I speak, and think in the same language in which I see.”²⁴ While he wants to express things in his individual voice Crouwel wants to erase individuality to find universality. Boekraad attributes: “.. the pursuit for a visual language which is understandable for everyone.” And “...that he rejects beauty as a personal expression of emotions, as a purpose in graphic design.”²⁵

This also counts for the artistic expression in their work. “He resolutely ceases his free artistic production in 1955. The diversion of the artisanal artistic process, is done by Crouwel to such an extent that he never even presents sketches of his designs. He systematically destroyed the sketches of his designs.”²⁶ Martens on the other hand always practiced un-commissioned prints on his press — experiments that re-influence his commissioned practice in an artistic way. About Crouwel is said again: “The presence of the designer at the press is unthinkable for a designer like Crouwel, who delegates and writes the recipe.”²⁷



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28 Helvetica, Documentary by Gary Hustwit in 2007, interview with Wim Crouwel

29 Werkplaats Typografie, 2003, interview by Corina Cotorobai

30–32 IDEA Mag 344, 2011, interview by Emily King

33 Helvetica, Documentary by Gary Hustwit in 2007, interview with Wim Crouwel



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The book has nearly the same format (23·18 cm), the same soft-cover and a comparable width of spine as PM. But even as their body, the frame so to say, is nearly the same, the differences are in details. The cover's white paper, and the glossy inside paper appear more sober and clean than in PM. Also the stitch-binding, which opens perfectly on every spread, is more functional than a Japanese binding, but also more conventional. The consequent 5 mm margins aren't risky but proper.

At the choice of type it starts to get more interesting. Of course it is Adrian Frutiger's 'Univers', that Crouwel extensively used for the SM (a fact that becomes exhaustingly clear in the *oeuvre* list). The font was planned structural and systematic from top to bottom (its 36 styles are named by numbers). Crouwel says about typefaces: "It should be clear, it should be readable, it should be straightforward," and: "It shouldn't have a meaning by itself. The meaning is in the content of the text and not in the typeface."²⁸ Martens gives it a turn by using the font in black 75 for the running text. In this heavy weight the font gets a quirky character. It starts being a bit more Martens than Crouwel. Martens says: "For me working with type is like eating bread. I like a certain kind of bread, but sometimes I try another one. And then you discover how nice it is."²⁹ In this case he leaves his own bread behind and tries Crouwel's and discovers that the crust tastes better to him than the soft inside.

t The same applies for the type-area of the text-part. The text runs unjustified in straight columns. But the image is out of balance. There is only one text-column placed on left pages but two text-columns on right pages. There is a Crouwel-ish structuralism behind the order, but its math includes an imbalance that Crouwel probably would have considered as system-error. Martens in contrast likes these irregularities. "The work ends up looking so technically perfect, but at the same time so loveless. It looks as if the perfection is the goal,"³⁰ he mentions regarding Total Designs practice.

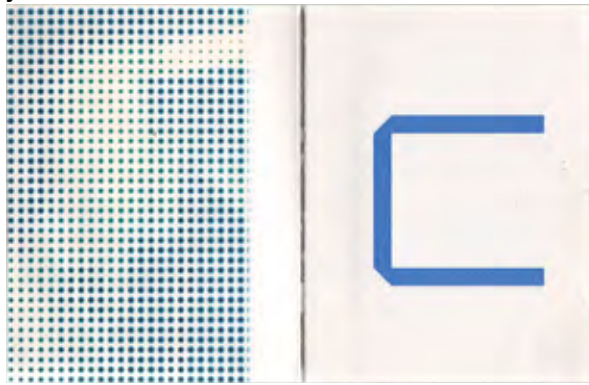
u "At the beginning of my career I was influenced by Wim Crouwel and the modernists, but later I tried to move away from that. I saw decay in the modernist approach. In the uniformity!"³¹ By the use of reference-imagery Martens even tops the imbalance. Although he sticks to the units of the grid, he lets the images come from top and bottom, from left and right or places them right in the middle. They are scaled over 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 grid-units depending on what he considers best for the image. He breathes life into the structures of the rigid grid in the manner he learned it of Crouwel's early work for SM. "In the beginning they were really poetic, but later, when that way of working became popular, the format became unbelievably boring."³²

Crouwel's work is not interested in decisions that fall out of the grid. His grid's task is to erase them. "I started using grids for my design. For my catalogues for museums I invented a grid and within the grid I played my game. But always along the lines of a grid so that there is a certain order to it."³³ Martens' 'hidden tracks' are not able to survive in such climates. And still he managed to sneak one into MeM. On bottom of page 32 there is a cut out picture

w of a Fiat 600, 12·25 mm in size, close to the spine. It reminds of the place of the 'clou' container on PMs page 13. The text says that it was the first car Crouwel ever bought. The Fiat 600 is a neat, in shape rather clumsy, small Italian car with four seats, a 28 hp engine and a high-speed of 90 kmh. Compared to the British Morgan race-car with which Crouwel presented himself in the 60s (full bleed depicted on the following page), the Fiat is rather ridiculous. The Morgan 2-door coupe has a cocky but elegant shape, about 142 hp and a maximum speed of 189 kmh. I would claim that it is Martens' humour that placed this connection. It may question the extravagant and exaggerated position of Crouwel. The gesture of his pose gets invalidated and it says: he puts his pants on one leg at a time, too.

x y Another strong element in MeM are the spreads that divide the chapters of the book. On these pages are blown up glyphs of Crouwel's 'New Alphabet', a font he designed in 1967. The font was a reinterpretation of the Latin alphabet that was custom made for the phototypesetting equipment. The font was impossible to read.

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34 MeM, p.5, 'Voorwoord', by Frederike Huygen

35 The Form of the Book Book, 2009, 'The Matta-Clark Complex: Material, Interpretation and the Designer', by James Goggin

36 PM, p.192-197, 'Karel Martens and education', interview by Michael Cina, 2005

37 PM, p.189-191, 'Karel Martens: meticulous and personal', by Hugues C. Boekraad, Judges' Report, H.N. Werkman Prize, 1993



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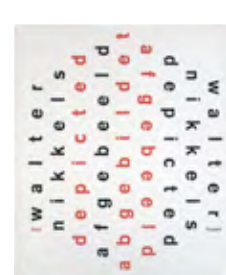
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But still a remarkable impetus of design that reacts to technological conditions.

On the book's first page is a big C for Crouwel. When we open the flap: W H C — Willem Hendrik Crouwel. The following glyphs in between the chapters were a riddle to me. As I cut the spreads together I finally realized that it is merely the set of numbers 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 — not the secret message I was hoping for.

What happens with these dividers is, that the glyphs get blown up to a degree where they remain only form, not letters. The readability is out of focus, but the font's shapes are fully honoured. In this moment we judge them not as a font but as drawings, which are beautiful. Martens points out this aspect and gives it a stage.

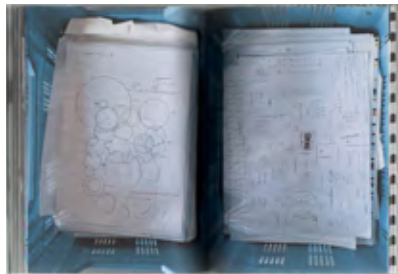
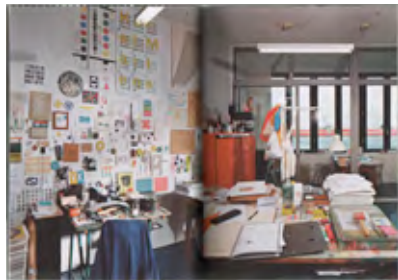
Talking about stages. Whereas most of the imagery in the oeuvre-list is scaled down to small sizes that fit the shelf-idea of the grid, a few are blown up to full bleed. The most prominent of them is the 'Extra bulletin over het werk van Wim Crouwel', 1979. The booklet gets fully reproduced over 8 pages. Its design seems to leave the straightness of Crouwel's ordinary layouts. It is rather dominated by chaos than by order. The bottom layer is a grey background, enriched by halftone pictures. The second layer are works that get special attention, and which are printed in black, red and blue. The third layer is the text printed in black which is not only ignoring the structure and borders of the background layer, but also runs over and into the second layer, interrupting the works with special attention.

A complex biographic list in the end of MeM can be seen as a visual quote or homage to this bulletin — it uses the same effects and techniques. Maybe even taking them further in complexity. We also have a background-layer with halftone images, full-tone images printed over and finally the text in partly overlapping columns. All printed in the same fresh blue as the preface.

Overall Martens/Van Triest achieve a book-design that relates to Crouwel's work, but that leaves space for criticism. They allow themselves to emphasize the depicted material under their own preferences (the alphabet, the bulletin). They also leave space to question Crouwel's position with humour and irony when they confront the Morgan to the Fiat 600. They use his grids and his order but give them their own turns (the asymmetry, the extra bold type). As the authors mentioned in the preface; the book intended a critical reflection that does not deny being somehow subjective or claims to be the universal truth. "The book is certainly not meant as the final word about Crouwel's work." ³⁴ The layout of Van Triest/Martens manages to fulfill the same standard. James Goggin says about the interpretation of art in books: "The book should subjectively communicate the work in a sympathetic way, but not attempt to be the work, or risk being mistaken as such." ³⁵ Triest and Martens keep a clear personal visuality without treating Crouwel with disrespect. Martens says: "Form needs to give access to the content instead of veiling it. It should express something from the content. Content is never completely perfect and the package also needs to express that." ³⁶ And Hugues C. Boekraad attributed: "Martens the designer is no actor, making other people's texts vanish into the echo of his broadly projected voice. It is not his person but his attitude and professionalism that remain recognizable in the product." ³⁷

The culture of the design-monographs

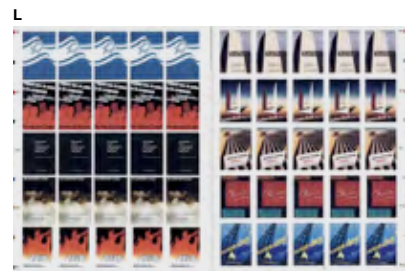
It is important to mention that design-monographs are mostly released in the Netherlands. The graphic design culture in Holland is a very self-confident one. It is regarded as an independent cultural discipline, whereas in most other countries it is simply seen as a commercial craft. After MeM, monographs on Otto Treumann (1999), Willem Sandberg (2004) and Jan van Toorn (2008) were released in the series 'Graphic design in the Netherlands' funded by Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds. A recently released Jurriaan Schrofer monograph (2013) and a monograph on Walter



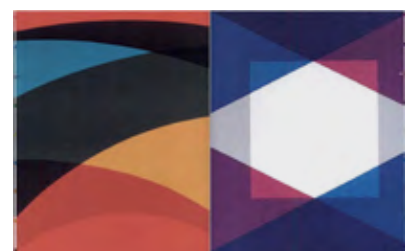
K



J



38 Karel Martens:
weerdruk, Lecturis
Documentaires 27, 2004,
'Inleiding', by Carel
Kuitenbrouwer
39 Graphic Magazine,
2003, 'Crouwelism',
Conversation with Wim
Crouwel and Experimen-
tal Jetset
40-41 Inside Design
Lecture Series: Irma
Boom, Walker Art Centre,
Minneapolis, 2010



Nikkels (2013) are likewise funded by the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds. What was the Cultuurfond for these books was the Heineken Price of Art for PM: an official financial and cultural legitimization. The status and stage these books bring the designers is enormous. Their work gets broadly distributed and a lot of attention. For both Karel Martens and Wim Crouwel their monographs were only the start of further publications and magazine features on their work. G H (ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE)

This accolade status may contradict the graphic designer's actual practice, which is in principle a serving over a creating one —the designer reacts to questions from outside. In the monographs we judge the quality of a design merely through superficial aspects. When we look at Martens' phone-cards for example, we judge them as an image, not as the object that originally also had a function. We're running the danger of mistaking the reproduction as the work —and forget that they are only a depiction of it. By repeated reproduction they collaterally exhaust and loose value. I found depictions of the phone-cards in four different publications. A disconnection takes place, whereby the designer is no longer judged by his actual work, but by what is left of it in its reproductions. He is caught in the crossfire of self-referentialism. The revised versions of PM (2001, 2010) perfectly illustrate this: like a matryoshka doll they contain a full bleed reproduction of themselves.

Karels Martens latest book 'Full Colour' (2013) can be seen as a clever reaction to this exhaustion, but also as a proof of it. Instead of reproductions Martens shows photographs of his studio. He conducts the focus off the work to the environment where it was created in. On 134 pages the view of the photographic camera guides us through the overall studio, then we zoom into some details on the walls, before we finally end up rifling through boxes of sketches. He avoids to reproduce his actual work again and sets a mood instead, which gives the reader a more abstract impression of his practice. This abstraction however throws a mystifying light on his design-practice and gives it a scent of ingeniousness. It tells us the old story of the solitary artist in his atelier which does not go so well together with Martens' earlier statement that he does not regard his prints as art. "Martens rarely exhibits his free work — he himself would never call it art. He never considers his works done and he never sells any of it." ³⁸ Martens' need to exhibit and archive himself may exaggerate here.

Other designer-monographs have been accused of representing their subject with too little enthusiasm and respect towards its work. Wim Crouwel mentions in a conversation "I think that the work of someone like Irma Boom is a good example of this. I find her work fantastic and very spiritual, but take for example the biography of Otto Treumann she composed: that is in fact a book about her, not Otto Treumann." ³⁹

The main attraction in the book is a quite radical treatment and selection of Treumann's works. On the cover Boom depicts all 700 works Treumann did in his life in miniature size. Then throughout the pages she progressively zooms into his work (the works get repeated up to five times on one page). In the middle she shows about 30 works full bleed—stamps and posters scaled to the same size. Finally the last 16 pages get filled with crops, which Boom took out of Treumann's works. The crops indeed get compositions/works of their own, which have little to do with the originals. Boom herself said regarding the book: "Sometimes books are a success and sometimes they are a failure. I thought ... [it] was really nice, but the subject Otto Treumann didn't like it at all" ⁴⁰. In the end nobody was pleased with the book because artist and interpret could not relate. "His generation of designers did not like it and I thought ... well ... fuck you" ⁴¹. The constellation underrated the enormous responsibility that comes with the monograph. Otto Treumann (1919†2001) who used his design skills to forge passports for jews during the German occupation, died being dissatisfied about the way his oeuvre got preserved.

G



2004 Karel Martens: weerdruk



2010 GRAPHIC#15, 32 pages feature



2011 idea344, 64 pages feature



2013 full colour, catalogue for an exhibition in tokiro



2003 Wim Crouwel – Alphabets



2007 Typographic Architect, catalogue to an exhibition in Paris, turned out a little monograph



2007 idea323, coverstory



2009 gerrit noordzij prize, publication

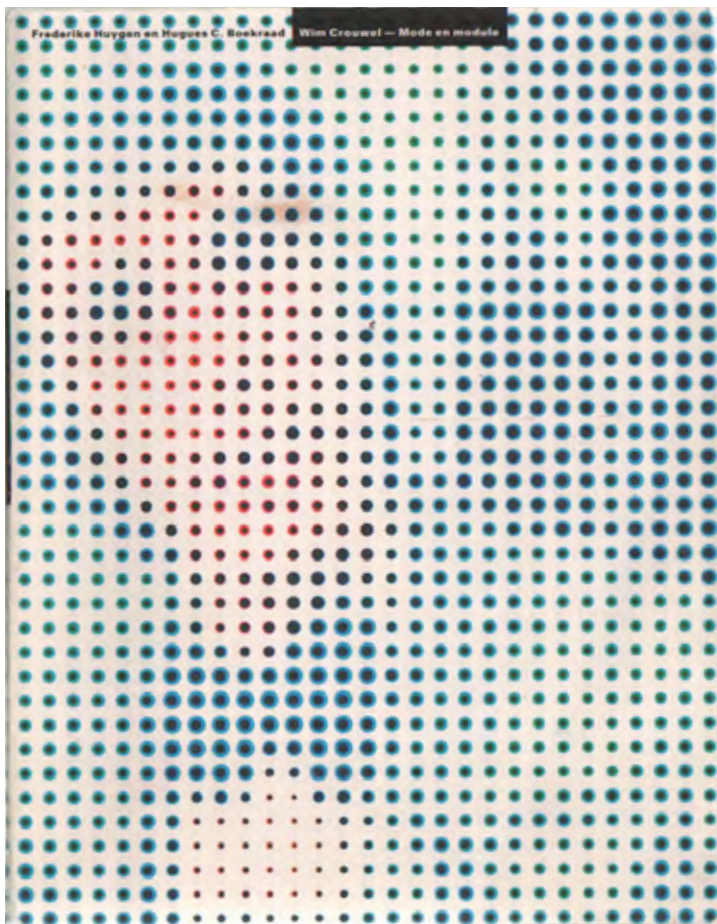


2011 a graphic odyssey, catalogue to an exhibition in Design Museum London

H



m Martens gives full attention to his prints, which he considers as main source of inspiration for his individual design practice.



n A portrait of Crouwel is resolved into a system of dots. It covers his request for systematization but also his dandyism.

PROLOGUE Last week I had the chance to briefly talk to Jaap van Triest at the presentation of the Jurriaan Schrofer monograph. This conversation relativized my analysis in a good way. Van Triest was pleased that I discovered details like the container, the Heineken bottles and the Fiat 600 — which really was intended as a comment on Crouwel. He also saw the biographic list in MeM as a reference to the Stedelijk Museum's bulletin design. But the rich and varying picture part in PM for him was merely due to the fact that he got his first computer system and scanner in 1996. It was simply possible to reproduce all the works Martens did so far — not necessarily the result of the question of how a monograph can be designed lively. They took the possibilities that the new techniques offered and finished the book (that was traditionally part and financed by the Heineken Price of Art) in only one summer, while on the Crouwel monograph they were already working for years. With the earlier release they sort of outsmarted their idol Crouwel, which left them a mischievous smile.

PM's success was not predictable. A success which invites to over-interpretations. Decision which in the first case were based on chance, get loaded.

It also became clear that Jaap Van Triest is the actual executing designer behind the books. Their secret may be the interplay of Van Triest's skilled ability to deal with 200–400 pages of complex information and Martens' attitude to sneak human failure into it — the friction which prevents the books from being dry. In the public eye Jaap Van Triest disappears in the shadow of Karel Martens, but his contribution to the books is of the same importance as Martens'. Their collaboration could be compared to others like Walter Nikkels and Lothar Baumgarten or Roger Willem and Mark Manders — but that would be a thesis of its own.

However conscious or unconscious Printed Matter and Mode en Module were designed and however much Jaap Van Triest or Martens both books may contain — I close them, put them off the table and back into the shelf where they belong to. There they can be again what they simply are: books. Even if extraordinary ones.