

The Fed Galleries Explores the Michigan Origins of Modern Design with New Exhibitions

From the revolutionary graphic design work of the post-WWII era to the enormous influence of modern design on contemporary local artists, two new exhibitions transcend the gallery with an in-depth exploration of our region's rich design heritage.

When the [Michigan Modern](#) symposium commences on June 19, The Fed Galleries inside the Woodbridge N. Ferris Building will take you beyond the art on the walls and into the heart of West Michigan's 60-plus year history of design innovation with *Michigan Modern: Killing It* and *Shifting Landscapes: Selected Works by Michael Pfleghaar*, two new exhibitions that are aimed at furthering the symposium's exploration of West Michigan's unique contributions to modern design.

"These exhibitions give the public another entry point into the larger dialogues that Michigan Modern will create around our region's potent design history, how it has impacted modern design as a whole, and how it continues to shape the processes and production of those who are creating today," said KCAD Curator of Exhibitions Michele Bosak.

Michigan Modern: Killing It **June 19-July 19, 2014**

In the wake of World War II, the economy was booming and a new breed of graphic design was on the rise. Right here in West Michigan, companies like Herman Miller and Upjohn were putting complete trust in designers, giving them the freedom to break free of tradition and produce work that was way ahead of the curve. Featuring advertisements, brochures, annual reports, posters, catalogs, and textiles from this enormously important era of graphic design, *Michigan Modern: Killing It* highlights the trends that were born out of this bold work and explores its influence on the graphic designers of today.

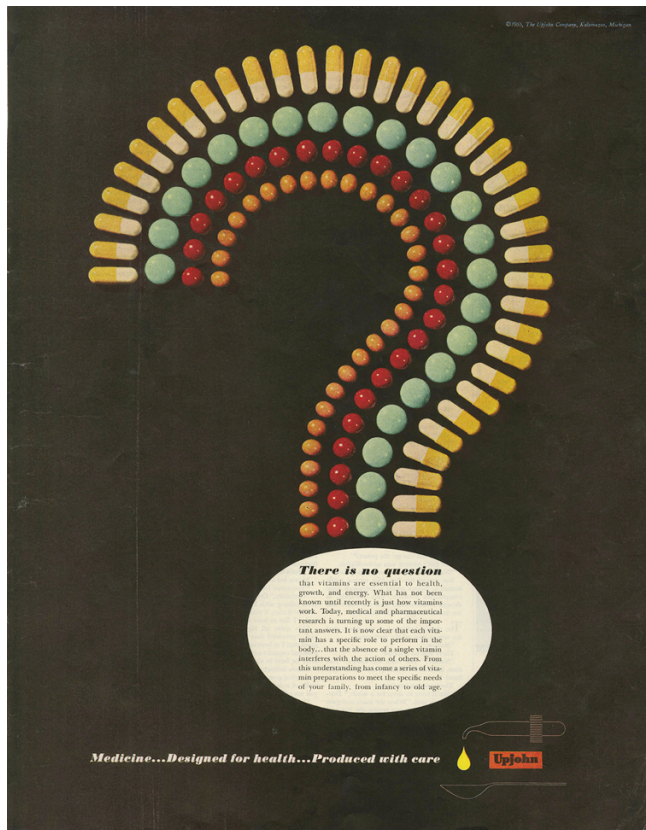
Bosak worked with co-curators Barbara Loveland and Linda Powell to identify West Michigan companies that were incorporating innovative graphic design into their promotional efforts during that time period – Herman Miller, Steelcase, Howard Miller, Upjohn, and Brunswick, among others. They then began scouring public and private archives for design work that reflected new illustration styles, enhanced use of color, typography that was integral to the design, and thought-provoking and inspirational concepts.

"These companies recognized the value of good design and understood this was true for their sales and promotional tools as well as their products," said Loveland. "The products needed to be innovative and creative, yet still function as expected, and these companies realized that to communicate this message, their ads and sales literature had to be equally innovative and creative. A good design director like George Nelson, whose office did a prolific amount of work for Herman Miller and other companies, was instrumental in helping his clients understand this parallel."

From logos like the one Nelson's office designed for Herman Miller, which is still used by the company today, to thoughtfully detailed layouts and abstract, interpretive styles created by designers around the region, this forward-thinking graphic design elevated the medium to an art form and sparked trends that would sweep the world and influence design and designers for years to come.

"Many of the pieces in the exhibition look like they are current, but when you notice the publication dates you realize how incredible it is that this work that is 40 or 50 years old still stands as powerful design today," said Powell. "It makes you wonder who, today, will have the same impact on graphic design in the next 50 years."

For more information on the Michigan Modern symposium, visit: michiganmodern.org.



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