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Illinois Wesleyan University

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Riley Blindt

John Wesley Powell Undergraduate Research Conference, 2013

Illinois Wesleyan University

Hi, I'm Riley Blindt. I'm a B.A. graphic designer and I've been in design now for 2.5 years. Over that time I've found that there are a few things that show up repeatedly in my work and the three that I'll talk about today are: femininity, minimalism and the feeling of nostalgia. Upon first glance of many of my pieces you might notice that there is a distinct feminine quality about them. The color palette tends to be softer, shape is often more subtle and gentle, and sometimes even the image in question is something that is distinctly feminine. At the beginning, seeing this pattern in my work was something that was a little disconcerting because I was afraid of my work coming across as too womanly. But it didn't take long for me to find a way of fixing this problem: the solution for me was to inject humor and wit into my pieces. This felt like a natural way to appeal to all viewers. For example, in my piece "I Love Everybody", the color palette is pastel and the predominate color is pink, which is a color we tend to associate with women. But, as I mentioned I never want to leave a piece exclusive to 50% of the population, which is where the incorporation of wit and humor becomes relevant. It's easy enough to start carrying over that theme with the title being what it is, "I Love Everybody and Other Atrocious Lies", it's a title that I'm pretty sure almost everyone can identify with cause I am sure you get frustrated with everyone. But upon finding the image that is used in the piece I was certain that that was the one that was perfect for the cover because the woman seems to embody that sort of persona while trying not to let her disdain towards people overwhelm her and I felt that that was very suiting for the piece. My goal is to take something that at first glance is ultra-feminine and to give it a dollop of sass and humor which I would hope engages a much broader audience.

Another quality that you'll notice in my work is the execution of a minimal technique. I find for myself that one of the best ways to communicate an idea is often to keep it simple. I like to present the audience with something that they can recognize and interpret but will cause them to think about it even after they have long past it. One example of this is the book cover and post-design for my book "Then and Now: Immigration Stories" which you'll view over here. The book itself contains testimonials from immigrants of the past and present dealing with their immigration process to America. It was important to keep on theme but still try to represent both the past and present in an authentic way. The best way I felt I could do that was by embroidering an illustration of the continents onto a piece of fabric. I felt that this was a representation of a common job taken on, past and present, by immigrants and that job is

clothing manufacturing. By simply using the piece of thread and a square of fabric, I felt like I was able to inject undertones of a mutual struggle and successfully communicate the theme of the book.

The last quality I'll talk about is that of nostalgia. You may notice that this is directly used through the use of old photographs and also less directly in my work with branding for "The Perfect Slice". Many of my pieces here use old photographs, a fascination of which was most likely stems from my relationship with my grandmother. I spent a great deal of time with my grandmother as a child and going through her old family photos is one of my fondest memories spent with her. This memory has had a large effect on how I approach my design work, specifically my series of posters on the circus life. I was able to go to Milner Library at ISU and sift through their vast collection of circus pictures. And those pictures are over there at the end. My goal was to create a scene that highlights the beauty and dangers of what it meant to be a circus performer in the early 1900's. By separating the figure from the background, in isolation and the feeling of disembodiment exaggerates this feeling of danger. My goal in designing with a sense of nostalgia, as it is with other techniques, is to get the viewers to slow down. We live in a fast paced and high-tech world so being able to get the viewer to take a break is a great success. This is a very important theme to me because I don't want to just communicate at the viewers; I want to communicate with them through my work. In branding the bakery "The Perfect Slice" I used hand drawn line work to create this feeling of something homemade which I think is important when you're trying to deal with food because you want to create that feeling of homemade food. My aim was to create an atmosphere where people feel like they can stop and relax and eat a piece of pie and not have to think about anything else but eating that pie in that moment. I wanted them to be swept away by nostalgia. My hope is that that is what I am accomplishing.

Through my work I hope to create a moment that people will take with them and hopefully that makes a memorable impression. Thank you.

Q & A Session Afterwards:

Q: So is Milner Library going to get a few of these?

A: Yes.