

# graphic design as an experience

Anglais



# **Graphic design as experience**

**Research project in Master  
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Céline Renault**



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# Abstract

My dissertation deals with *experience* and *experiment* in graphic design. My purpose is to make people experiment graphic design.

The two main terms of my research paper are experience and experiment.

- experience while trying
- experimenting while making operations in order to study something.

How can experimenting and experiencing a visual element differ from visual contemplation ?

I personally suffered from dyscalculia at elementary school. It was very complicated for me to understand mathematics. I worked with several therapists, such as a speech therapist, a psychomotor therapist and a mathematic psychologist. To understand how to count, I used small cubes, each cube represented a figure. Piling up ten cubes corresponded to number

ten and so on. At the end, I had a much bigger cube. To understand how division worked, I held some figurines in my hands, I then placed them on a sheet of paper to visualize what was happening when dividing them .

My own experience explains the reason why I have long been interested in experimenting the learning process. Can this apply to graphic design as well in order to understand better the signs of our environment ?

Is it possible to experiment graphic design ? What use can graphic designers make of it ? How can this be beneficial to graphic design ?

# 1. Experimenting and seeing are two different kinds of relationship to an image

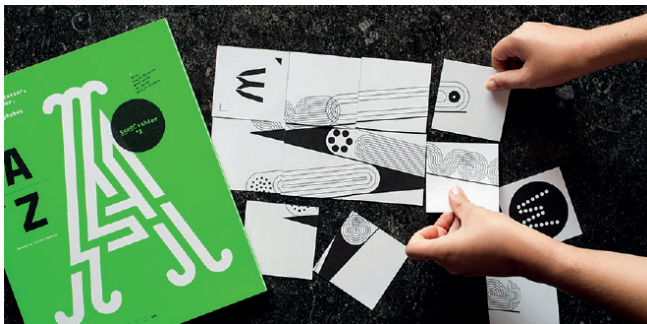
Experimenting and seeing or watching are two different kinds of relationship to an image. In fact, the image to see or to look at is complex. It is necessary to share its reading with other people. We can compare it to a triangle whose three angles are the image, others and I. The philosopher and specialist of images Marie-José Mondzain works on this topic<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Qu'est-ce que voir une image ?*  
Conférence de Marie-José Mondzain, 13 juillet 2004, durée 85min, auteur/producteur UTLS - la suite, 3 décembre 2017 à 10h01, [https://www.canal-u.tv/video/universite\\_de\\_tous\\_les\\_savoirs/qu\\_est\\_ce\\_que\\_voir\\_une\\_image.1405](https://www.canal-u.tv/video/universite_de_tous_les_savoirs/qu_est_ce_que_voir_une_image.1405) le 1<sup>er</sup> décembre at 2pm

If the image to see is complex, the role of a graphic designer is to deconstruct and build the image again to make it more meaningful. There are a lot of objects in graphic design, like books, flip books, that need to be handled in order to understand better the conception, the development the composition of the image or to learn a notion or a subject like typography.

Such is the case of *Le cahier n°1* du Bureau 205 *De A à Z : apprendre l'alphabet*.





Le cahier n°1 *De A à Z : apprendre l'alphabet* by Bureau 205

The book *Go: A Kidd's Guide to Graphic Design*. Chipp Kidd. A book is dedicated to kids 10 and up about concepts like form, typography, scale, and color theory.

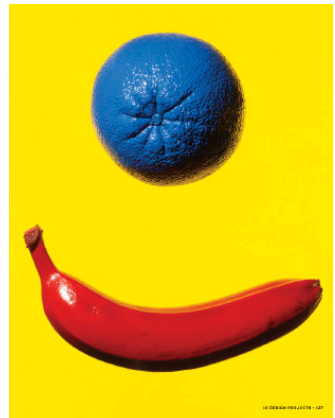
## DESIGN PROJECT #2

### Color Your World

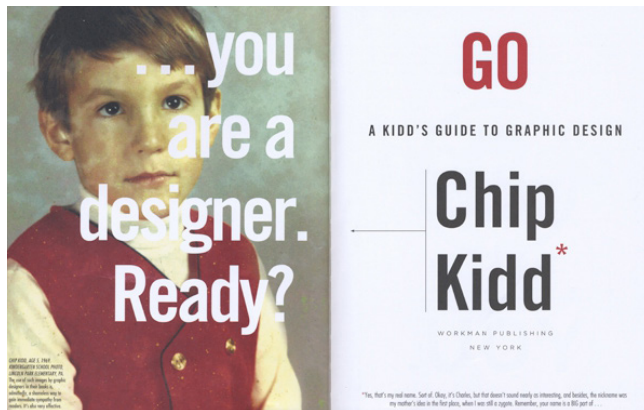
This project is all about color (pages 60–67). Remember primary and secondary colors? Remember how certain colors “clash” against other colors (page 58)? Here’s your chance to test those theories and decide for yourself what kind of color palette you most interesting to you.

For this design project, take something that you are always used to seeing a certain color, and make it something else. Like a bunch of bananas—what if you painted them bright fluorescent red? And what would happen if you painted an orange bright blue? That’s what I did on the opposite page. Then I placed them on a bright yellow paper and photographed them. I think they’re beautiful, but they also change the way I perceive them.

Once you’ve decided what you’re going to “color,” you can use spray paint (with adult supervision) or acrylic craft paint. I only chose two items, but you can decide to do dozens. Then position the items on brightly colored construction paper. Don’t forget to post your creations on the website (see page 123)! And hey, it should go without saying, but do NOT eat any of this stuff after it’s been painted.



*Go : A Kidd's Guide to Graphic Design* by Chipp Kidd



Another example worth mentioning is *Aire de jeu* by Paul Cox. It is composed of modular elements to form a landscape. The participants can then realise that a landscape is a construction of nature seen by humans.



*Aire de jeu* by Paul Cox

Experimenting, handling objects or images allow to understand images or abstract notions. This is what the philosophers John Dewey, Edgar Morin (philosopher and sociologist) and Britt-Mari Barth (researcher and teacher) study.

<sup>1</sup> *Art as experience*, John Dewey, Folio essai, 23/04/2010

John Dewey in his book *Art as experience*<sup>1</sup> talks about experience in life. In 1984, he founded an experimental school in Chicago, based on the continuity of experience. He defines experience as an interaction between the body and its environment. According to him, experiencing is meeting people to argue. It is a real experience for him because it gives us the opportunity to question our beliefs of the world. The experience can be made at the first or at the second person and by means of a medium such as a book.

<sup>2</sup> *Enseigner à vivre, manifeste pour changer l'éducation*, Edgard Morin, Éd Actes sud, 03/09/2014

Edgar Morin in his book *Enseigner à vivre*<sup>2</sup> explains the importance of the experience of ignorance and

uncertainty at school. The experience of reality is double. It is a necessity to question the facts as there is no absolute truth. Humans are condemned to interpretation. Experiment through a book is as interesting as the experience in real life at the first person.

Britt-Mari Barth dedicates her work on the learning of abstraction. Her goal is to enable children to experiment while doing some activities to help them understand abstract concepts. The participants become researchers and the teachers become a mediator. It is a way for children to understand things better.

## 2. The process used by designers

I then focused on the process used by designers. Damien Conrad, in the poster campaign for the festival *LUFF* in 2011, engaged the public. This poster campaign was composed of two posters glued together. To discover the second poster people had to tear up the first poster. So they could destroy the whole image, the poster and the message of the campaign.



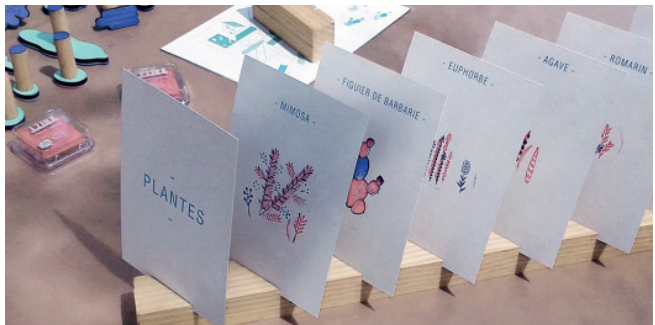
*Festival LUFF* in 2011 by Damien Conrad





Another interesting example is the project of the collective Les Jaunes Sardines, *Jardin urbain*. Parents and children were asked to create the picture of the event. They participated in the making of the picture so they understood its composition.





*Jardin urbain* by Les Jaunes Sardines

For the workshop *Galaxie des mouvements* by Malte Martin, secondary-school pupils used the logos and signs of the brands they liked. With the designer, they deconstructed these signs and placed them in the street in front of other signs in the public space. This project allowed kids to appropriate the signs of the consumer society and to create something else, to raise the public's awareness on brands and signs.





*Galaxie des mouvements* by Malte Martin

### 3. The role of designers

This part focuses on the danger of manipulating images.

The idea for graphic designers is to deconstruct images and manipulate them not to be seen as manipulators.

In the 80's and 90's some graphic designers questioned the dangers of propaganda in the profession to raise awareness. Jan Von Toorn, a graphic designer, was interested in the impact of images created by graphic designers. In his book *Graphisme et reflexivity* published in 1994, he insisted on the role of mediation that designers should play. It is necessary to have a critical perspective when dealing with images which is what graphic designers should do.

<sup>1</sup> *Le graphisme en textes, lectures indispensables*, Helen Armstrong, Préface Ellen Lupton, Ed Pyramyd, 1/09/2011, p. 83.

The American designer Chipp Kidd, focuses on the same idea in his book entitled *Go! A Kid's Guide*

to *Graphic Design*. Indeed, in this book he makes kids understand the images of graphic design, understand how they are made and invites them to create images too as a sense-making mechanism for the world. The book explains that we do every day is through design. All the products we buy are created by someone, by a designer (from milk cartons to street signs).

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.brainpickings.org/2013/10/22/chip-kidd-go-book/>

« Graphic design needs your willing mental participation, even if it's subconscious. Graphic design is message-sending into the brain. It is a cerebral experience, not a physical one. Architecture wants you to walk through it. Industrial design takes your hand (or other body parts) to appreciate it. Fashion makes you put it on. But Graphic design is purely a head trip, from your eyes to your mind. »<sup>1</sup>

He also adds graphic designers must be careful with the images they create :

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.wired.com/2013/09/qq\\_chipkidd/](https://www.wired.com/2013/09/qq_chipkidd/)

« That regardless of whether it's ink on paper or pixels on a screen, the general principles don't change. I think what changes is how quickly you can make something, how quickly you can send it into the culture, and how careful you have to be about how you do that. »<sup>1</sup>

## 4. Design as a remedy

How can experiment in design offer a solution to the flaws of the society we live in ?

One possible solution is to organize workshops with citizens.

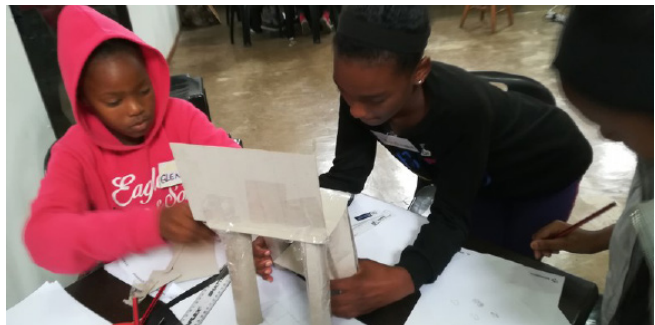
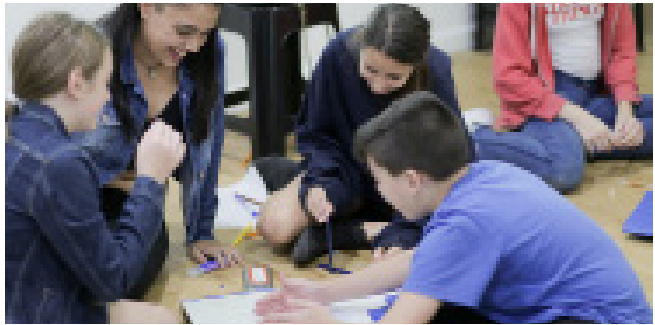
World Design Day is an event to celebrate design and Ico-D (international council of design). The goal of WDD is to challenge designers to reflect deeply on the well-being of people within their local environments, and to find innovative solutions to local needs by using design as a vehicle to celebrate diversity, transcend borders, and improve quality of life. The first WDD was on 27 April 1963 and it is celebrated everywhere in the world every year on the same day, April 27th. The participants are invited to gather, innovate, and live out a moment of design by organizing public events and initiatives.



The topic of WDD in 2016 is Design in Action ! They invited designers around the world to participate in WDD2016 by sharing examples of design in action in their city or community via Facebook and Instagram ! , sharing photos, videos, illustrations of the way design is used to make your life better.

The theme for WDD 2017 and 2018 were respectively *Start Young* and *Kids can too*. They want to change the world and become better, to organize educational workshops to teach children the basics of design because children make design as much as they do mathematics. During the workshop they introduce design concepts to kids. In 2017 WDD organized a workshop on *We are RAP*. The half-day activity was dedicated to design with some hand-on exercises to initiate the participants to a basic form of design methodology. Hand-on workshops gave children the opportunity to explore their creativity and their capacity to

solve problems and test their solutions. They were asked to observe, analyse, solve, model, and test their creations.



In the same way, the workshop *Fais-moi signe* by Malte Martin for the Pôle Molière, a cultural center, was an opportunity to play with the signage and the shapes of the visual identity of the venue as well as its activities.

During the construction of the building, the local people participated in different workshops. It allowed them to feel involved in the project and want to visit the place. Playing with the signage was a form of appropriation of the venue. The workshop enabled people to share their know-how and do it as a group.

For this workshop, Malte Martin collected the « 1% artistic » to finance the project. In France one percent of the total cost of a construction must be dedicated to the purchase of one or several contemporary pieces of art. It is the law. For this project, the designer Malte Martin did not sell pieces of art but enabled people to participate in workshops.

The one percent artistic was used to finance her workshops.

It is another approach of graphic design because the graphic designer has to find the financial partner. It is a different way to work. Indeed, the graphic designer's project has to suit the partner as well as the advertiser involved.

For *Fais-moi signe*, Malte Martin worked hand in hand with the cultural center on the shapes of the signage. He sold his competence as a graphic designer and added value to the project with a more humane, social work regarding the making of the signage. He is in a graphic order and, at the same time, in a citizen and democratic act.

Malte Martin's workshop engaged the public in the production of the signage to involve people in the project, to appropriate the venue (cultural center) with the shapes of the signage, to make them feel like visiting the place. My vision in the researcher is personal and join the work of Malte Martin.



*Fais-moi signe* by Malte Martin



## **5. The evolution of the graphic designer's work**

This kind of new practice with local partners modifies the work of graphic designers who then become educators and mediators.

Who can be involved in this type of graphic design ? How much can graphic designers earn ? How much does a workshop cost? What about the framework ?

It is another way of making graphic design. This is how I would like to work in the future. Indeed, I plan to organize workshops with people focusing on ethical values like sharing know-how and knowledge for the benefit of all.

## 6. Project

For my project, I organized a workshop called *Marseille j'te kiffe*. This workshop whose topic is LOVE, is based on the know-how, the sharing of culture and ideas and the « living together » for an ethical and social design. It is a workshop for the inhabitants of Marseille city to give each participant the opportunity to write love messages on post cards. At the end of the workshop, people have their own post cards to send to whoever they want in the city. The messages are created and written by the local people for the local people as the cards are then sent to other people from the city.

The idea came from an older project. Last year I wandered the streets of Marseille and wrote love sentences with a chalk on the pavements and the walls to declare my love for Marseille city. I took photographs of the different messages and then made a book of it.





Book : *Marseille j'te kiffe* by Céline Renault

2018 is a special year for the city of Marseille. Indeed, Marseille Provence 2018 is a 6 month cultural event on the theme of love.

I chose the same topic for my workshop because love is a universal language. All the participants can feel free to express themselves with their own cultural backgrounds. They can write and draw messages in any language. It is one way to see the social and ethnic communities of Marseille and to share different cultures and feelings during the workshop. It is a way to engage the know-how and the living together.

The aim of the workshop is to raise the public's awareness to graphic design and typography.

I created a typography last summer during my internship at Borély Museum of Marseille. This type is called Typo tomette. It is based on an hexagon shape. A « tomette » is a particular

tile, a symbol of Provence. It is a modular type. I divided the hexagonal shape of a tomette into 6 pieces, 4 pieces, and 2 pieces. This resulted in a few different shapes like triangles with which we can compose all the letters of the alphabet. Signs and pictures can be created with these different shapes too.

To finance this workshop I had to fill in different files in order to get sponsored by some cultural institutions. It was not an easy task because it was difficult for me to promote my project in order to find the right cultural partners. I participated in a forum at the CRDP (Centre Régional de Documentation Pédagogique) in Marseille where all the local cultural structures of the Provence-Alpes-Côtes d'Azur region were represented. This forum was dedicated to the meeting between the teachers of the region and the local cultural structures. The goal was to allow schools to organize cultural activities. The region is also engaged in the transmission

of the cultural heritage, on the development of creativity. I met some people there and I sent my project to some structures. I canvassed the local cultural structures to work with me and to accept my workshop. I managed to convince Borély Museum to work with me. They helped me to find a class to participate in my workshop.

My first workshop targeted middle school pupils aged 14. It took place at Borély Museum. Two sessions were necessary.

The first session was at Borély Museum in a specific room dedicated to « educational workshops ». First I made the teenagers have a close look at the tomettes on the ground floor of the Museum. After that we started the workshop. I explained the hexagonal shapes, why I had decided to separate the shapes to create a unique typography. I talked about the job of typographers and graphic

designers. I asked them questions such as who creates typography, who uses typography, etc.

Then, I presented the typography *Typo Tomette* with lower cases, small capital letters and large capital letters. Then I introduced the topic and the goal of the workshop *Marseille j'te kiffe*. I explained the aim was to create love messages and to declare their love for the city of Marseille. We talked at length on the topic of love, what they liked about Marseille (the sun, the sea, the soccer team, etc).

During this first session, the goal was to appropriate the modular typography *Typo tomette* with transparent colorful shapes. With the different shapes they tried and created the first letter of their own name. Then they were able to create other signs, other letters, other images. They could play with the transparent color shapes. They could follow the alphabets proposed and create other signs.

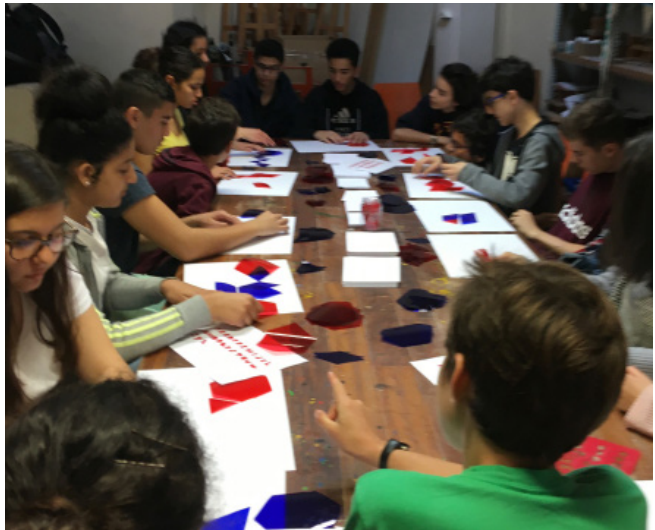
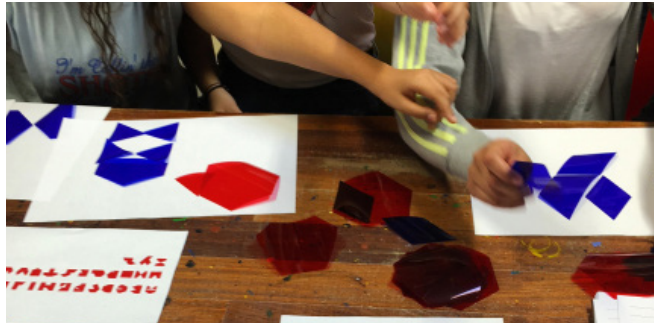
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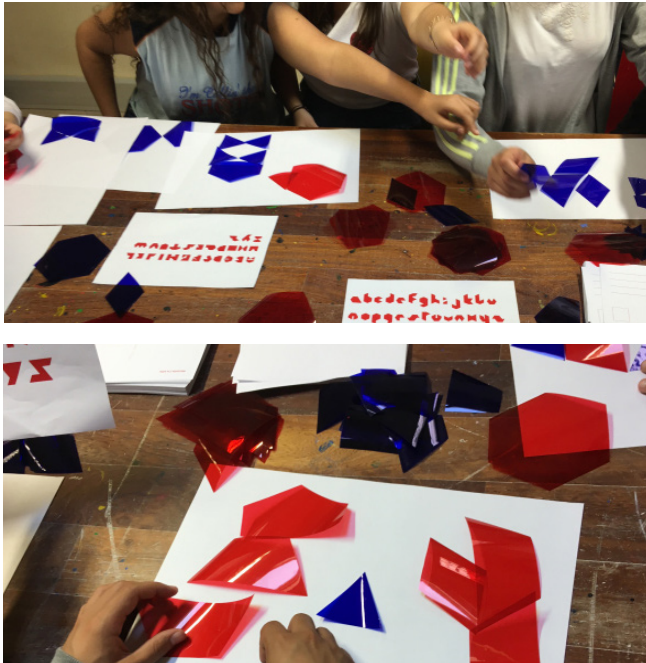
After with stencils and pastels they wrote their names on post cards and tested different compositions in the space of the post cards. They could write the letters as they liked, in the right order or at random. They could superimpose the letters or not. They could draw the outline of the letter or fill in the letter. They could make an all over on the post card or just draw one letter. They were given the chance to experiment different techniques.

At the end of the first session I took photographs of the visual productions of the pupils. I asked to think about love messages and sentences for the following session at love messages.

One week later, during the second session, I made a recap of the previous session, of their productions. Then I made them write love messages with stencils and stamps. At one point they could work in groups to create other messages.

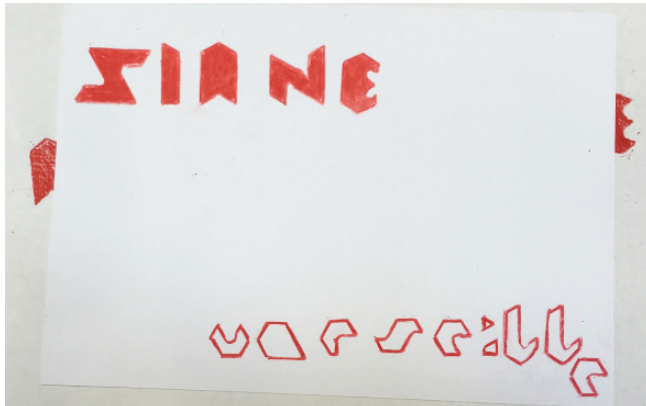


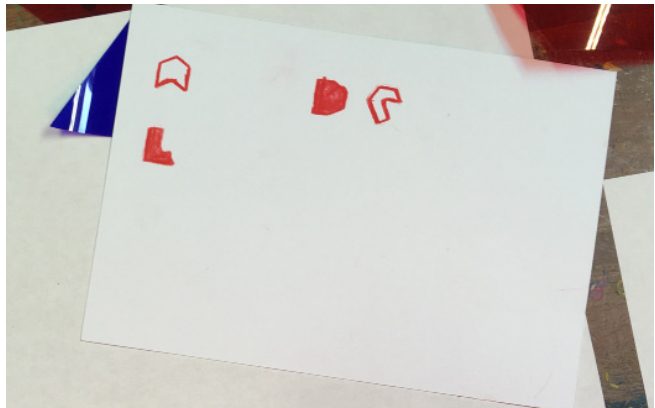
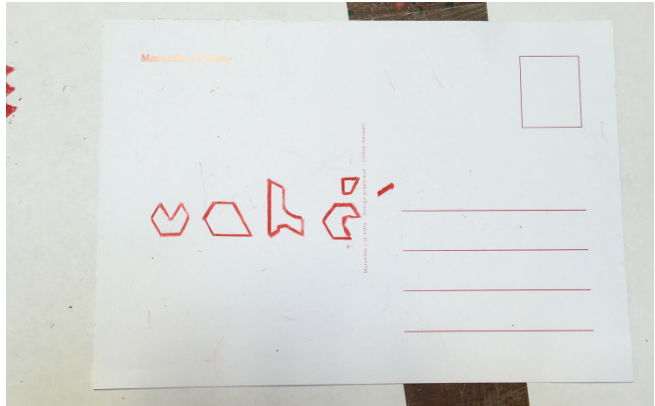




Workshop : *Marseille j'te kiffe* by Céline Renault







For this workshop each participant could exchange on their own experience, on their own language. They could either write or draw, make images in the language of their choice. They are very excited to write love messages in few different languages. It was an opportunity for them to share their knowledge, their know-how. This workshop was based on common good, on the meeting and living together. The participants created images, love messages together. It was a way of living together and creating together.

It was very interesting to see how they collaborated to create their images and messages. During the workshop, I talked to them about their production, their love messages. Handling shapes allow them to understand notions such as the composition on a page.

It is also a socialising process, and an alterity experience where all the participant share their knowledge, their know-how, and confront their

ideas. It is a cooperative experience to move forward together. It allows to form a community, thanks to the workshop which needs handling. The workshop shares and values skills, knowledge and experiences with others.

The graphic designer becomes both an initiator and a mediator. He helps people acquire an educational content. He supports and helps people reinforce the social ties.

At the end of the two sessions of the workshop, I could see the positive and negative points. The participants had written messages in different languages and exchanged their views on their love messages. They had socialized their ideas. I can also say that working and playing with the plastic color shapes helped create and experiment shapes endlessly.

They manipulated, experimented shapes in a different way, with their body and sight. At the end of the workshop, each participant left with their

post cards. The goal was to send their own post cards to people they liked or disliked, to pass on the messages in the city.

I also developed my modular typography in 3D. I create a 3D puzzle with plastic shapes. And I created bigger shapes in polystyrene to build









a panel and play with typography, to play with letters, images and deconstruct messages, letters, shapes to create new ones.

I also intended to create my typography in real tomette made of ceramics at Borély Museum as they have a ceramic department. They asked me to make an oral presentation of my project in 30 minutes and I am still expecting their answer to know whether I am accepted.

Despite the difficulties, it was a great experience for me which allowed me to tackle the reality of my future job, to work for a social and ethical design based on workshops. It was a very motivating project. I loved working with the children. It was very interesting to create images. It is definitely the kind of professional activity I would like to have as a graphic designer in the future.

Moreover I am ready to try to finance my workshop thanks to crowdfunding with the platform KisskissBankBank.

I plan to launch a crowdfunding campaign in September to finance my workshops and develop the typography in ceramic and in volume. It will also probably help me to find a place to carry on my workshops.

## 7. Conclusion

Experience and experiment allow another vision of graphic design and another practise of the job of graphic designer.

Experimenting and seeing are two different kinds of relationship to an image. Applied to graphic design, it allows to deconstruct shapes and messages. It allows to have a critical perspective when confronted to images. Graphic designers can engage a new way to deconstruct shapes, images to see and understand their messages, like in the case of the advertising.

Today graphic designers can have different roles; they can be mediators and pedagogues too. They can organize workshops to make people participate in the creative process. They can offer solutions to the flaws of the society we live in teaching the impact of images, the know-how, in helping share knowledge. As a designer I want to work with people, for the people.



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**Marie-José Mondzain :**

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**World Design Day :**

- <http://www.ico-d.org/projects/world-design-day#wdd2017-start-young>





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