

The Graphic Means panel, hosted by the program director for Graphic Design at Parkland University, Paul Young, includes some great and respected people in the field of graphic design. First is John Walker, a retired graphic design professor from Illinois State University. Laura Adams is another retired graphic designer, who graduated from the University of Illinois and worked with commercial businesses in the Illinois area. Jack Davis is a freelance designer who began his career in 1974 with his first job at the University of Illinois. Al Fleener in the last 13-14 years founded a local marketing and design firm called Surface 51. Joining remotely are April Greiman and Briar Levit. April is a graphic artist and designer, as well as dabbles in photography and has a studio named Made in Space. Briar Levit is the director of the film Graphic Means. She is a graphic designer herself, but wanted to tell the story of graphic design history which led to making the film Graphic Means.

The panel gives feedback on the Graphic Means movie to start, with many of the panel members commenting on the nostalgia of the transition from analog graphic design into the digital era. Al comments that he appreciated the explicit naming of the Hybrid Era, since it accurately captures the time during which designers would do some things by hand and then could use a computer to iterate. But at that time, taking the entire design process to the computer was unheard and unthought of.

April was a great inspiration and pioneer of the transition into the digital world. It was her background in traditional photography, videography, and computer hybridization that gave her the tools and the skills to contribute to the post-modern era. The last time she visited Champagne, she gave out strips of paper that said, “No thinking. If thinking, think nothing.” This phrase was a typographic homage to bringing zen to typography. Paul attributes the concept to quieting the logical part of the brain and making space for emotion and feeling.

These graphic designers lived across eras and learned a variety of skills, some of which while can still be taught and appreciated today, have become obsolete. It’s quite interesting to consider the physical danger that came from using physical tools. The panelists discuss some of their emergency room visits caused by mat knives, an experience which is far removed from the digital world of graphic design. Further than the tactile dangers of mechanical tools, digital tools lend themselves much more to iterative and experimental design. When you have to cut and slice and take time to create the composition you

want in the physical world, visualization is key. There are more critical and impactful decision points because you can't simply undo the last change or discard hours of work. This difference is really evidenced by mindset. When the process takes longer, a graphic designer is more reliant on being able to visualize design, and then must have the skills, tools, and craftsmanship to express that design.

It's also interesting to consider the tradeoffs of computer design against mechanical design. Briar found in her interviews that the majority of graphic designers wouldn't want to give up the speed of the modern computer. But this comes at the cost of the sensuality and craftsmanship of creating the forms by hand. Drawing and building graphics by hand allow for a detail and an understanding of form and balance that can sometimes be missed on a screen. Printing can help, but still doesn't replace the sensuality of using a hand tool. Taking a step back and breaking down forms can give appreciation to the craft. Considering the nuance of individual forms can give a designer more appreciation for a composition and opens the way for creativity.

April mentions repetitively tracing a Bodoni "o" over the course of a semester in order to learn the details and appreciation of the letterform. Briar emphasizes slowing down and giving time to sketch and ideate for those who study the craft of graphic design. Using a hand tool forges a connection and relationship with the piece in a way that a computer may not replicate. It allows for ideation and connection, without distraction, and the process needs time. Paul adds that you'll always see something the next day. Giving a project space to breathe, and making sure not to rush can really contribute to iteration and learn to enjoy the process.

John contributes further, acknowledging the benefit of having a guide or teacher and passing those skills on. Even in the digital world, having guidance and learning from experienced eyes can really help to shape a new graphic designer. Many of those teachers have roots and experience in eras not fully digital, and can contribute to shaping budding graphic designers. The tools that we have at our fingertips are amazing, but having an idea, and that tactile connection is where graphic design starts.