

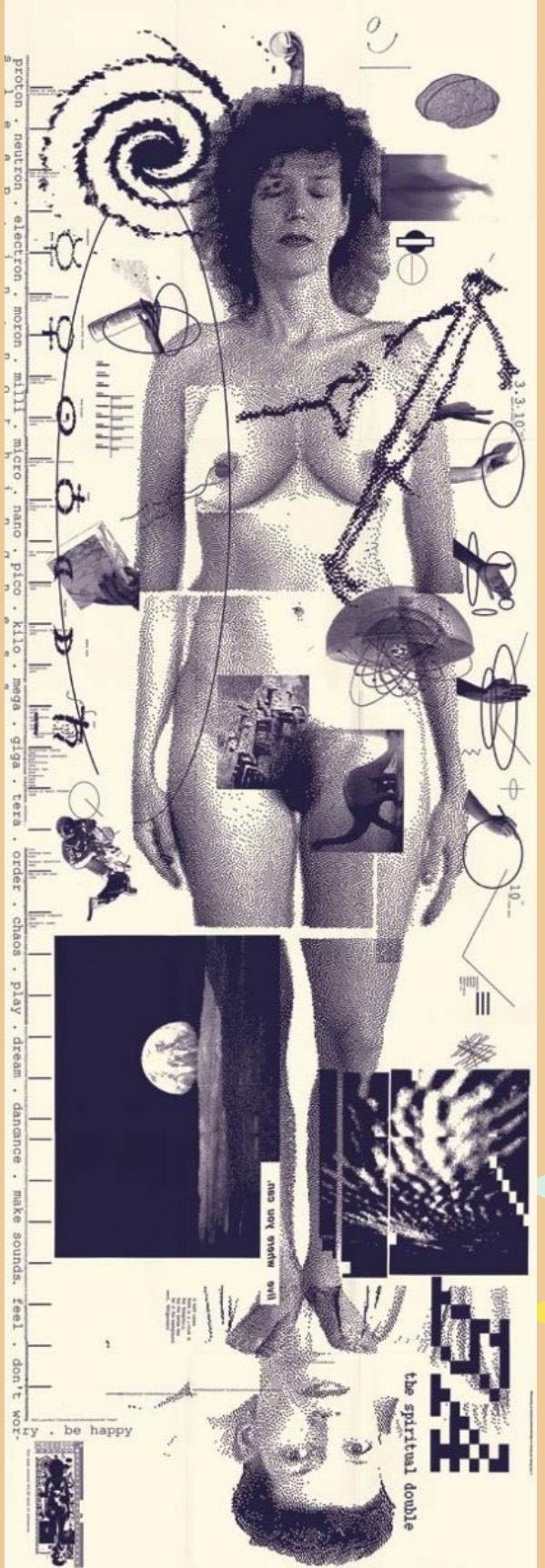


**DESIGN  
NOW!**

volume **88**

The Magazine on Influential Designers

**April Greiman**  
**breaking the grid**



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April  
Greiman

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Quarterly,  
no. 133,  
"Does  
It Make  
Sense?",  
front, 1987

graphic design

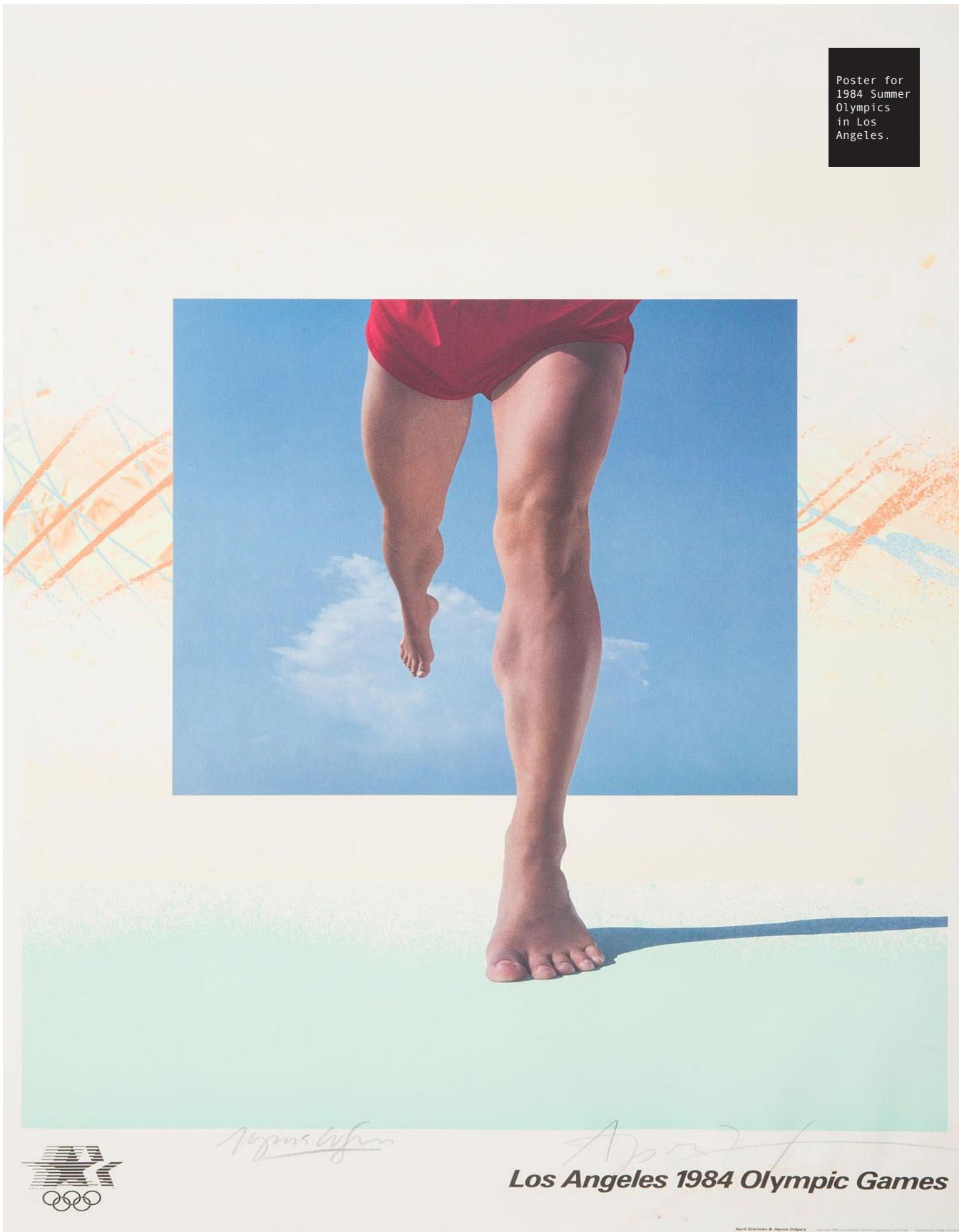
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"It takes a certain amount of  
**fearlessness**  
to stay perpetually ahead of the curve."

Born during the baby boom and raised in New York, Greiman was endowed with a curious spirit from the beginning, and grew up in a house where

### questioning was encouraged

and adventure was a part of life. Greiman had excellent role models in her father, mother, and her great aunt Kitty, a strong and independent woman who had danced with the Ziegfeld Follies and made excellence in her career a top priority. Greiman recalls her mother as a calm,

grounding influence  
as a curious,

and her father

wandering explorer  
who was easily distracted  
by whatever interesting thing crossed his path; affectionately,  
they called him "the original astronaut" because he was  
perpetually lost in the space of his own imagination. Neighbors  
called her family "The Flying Greimans" because they were

**always looking up**, searching for interesting  
phenomena, and traveling by air.

"I love this notion which exists in physics as well—that the observer is the observed, and the observed is the observer. The tools and technologies begin to dictate what and how you see something, or how the outcome is predictable. These ideas

**bring back the kid in me,  
that very pure curiosity.**

Her work has inspired designers to develop the computer as a tool of design and to be curious and searching in their design approach.

# transmediartist

Greiman finds the title graphic designer too limiting and prefers to call herself a "trans-media artist".

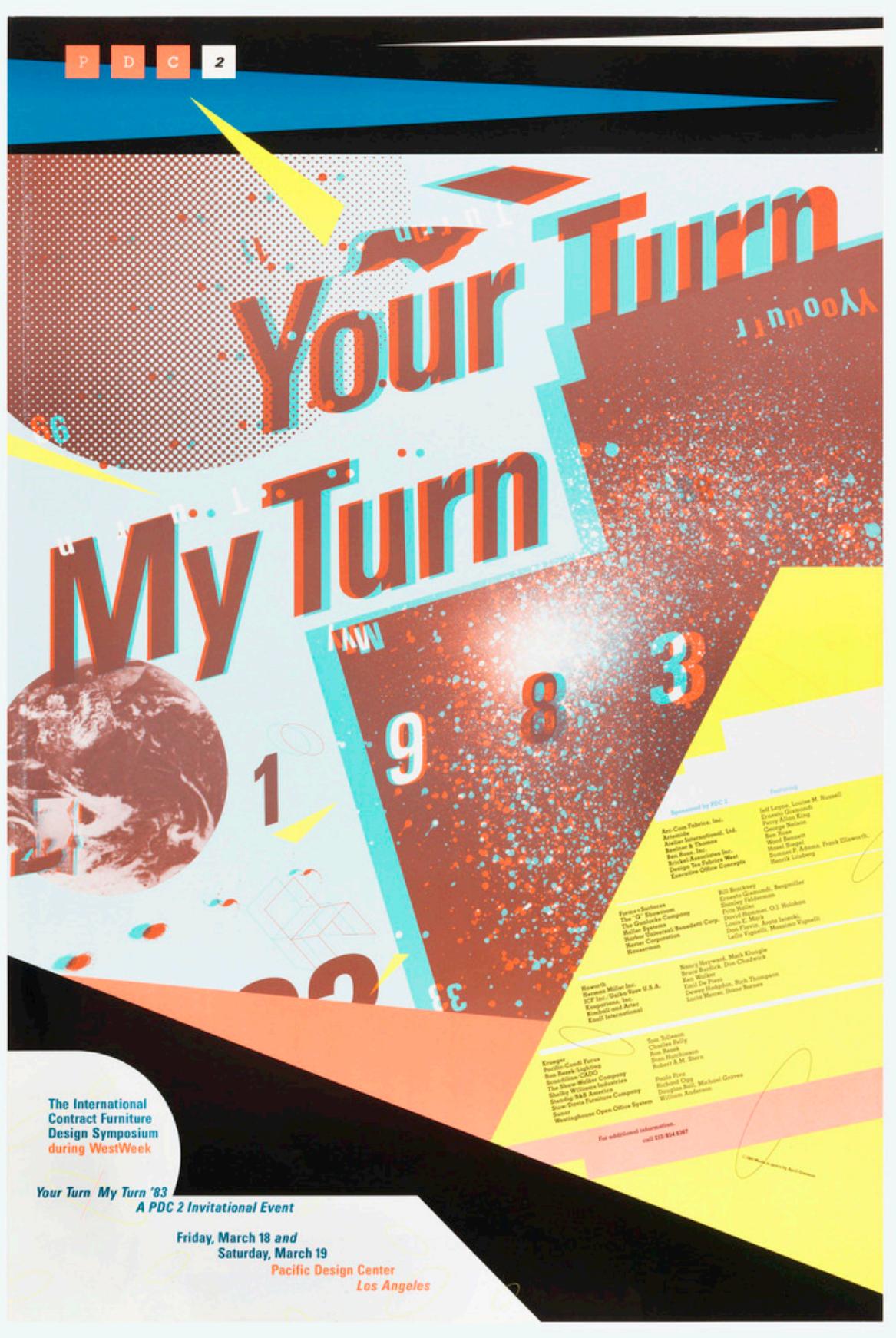
April Greiman designed the poster Your Turn, My Turn for a 1983 symposium in Los Angeles, California. The conference aimed to discuss the roles of artists, designers, and architects within the field of design and possibilities for multidisciplinary collaboration. In deference to the conference's ambitions, Greiman embraces innovation and freedom in her design by manipulating traditional forms with contemporary tools.

The world has changed and the field is changing to meet it." Greiman is adamant that we must be open to new paradigms, to new metaphors, to a whole new spirit of design: "It's not just graphic design anymore. The world has changed and the field is changing to meet it." Greiman is adamant that we must be open to new paradigms, to new metaphors, to a whole new spirit of design: "It's not just graphic design anymore.

**"It's not just graphic design anymore. We just don't have a new name for it yet."**

April Greiman is seen as one of the "ultimate risktakers" for her unorthodox and progressive approach to design by embracing new technologies. She explained that her more classical education has actually allowed her to tackle ideas without creative boundaries. This is due to her ability to communicate one message through multiple forms of media.

Poster, Your Turn, My Turn, International Contract Furniture Design Symposium, Pacific Design Center, Los Angeles, CA, 1983



# graphic design

Watching somebody operate the computer gave me a glimpse of how computers think. I had a feeling, almost through osmosis, of what was going on. It wasn't until many years later, in the early '80s, when I started working again with video Paintboxes that I had become a little more

## fearless with technology.

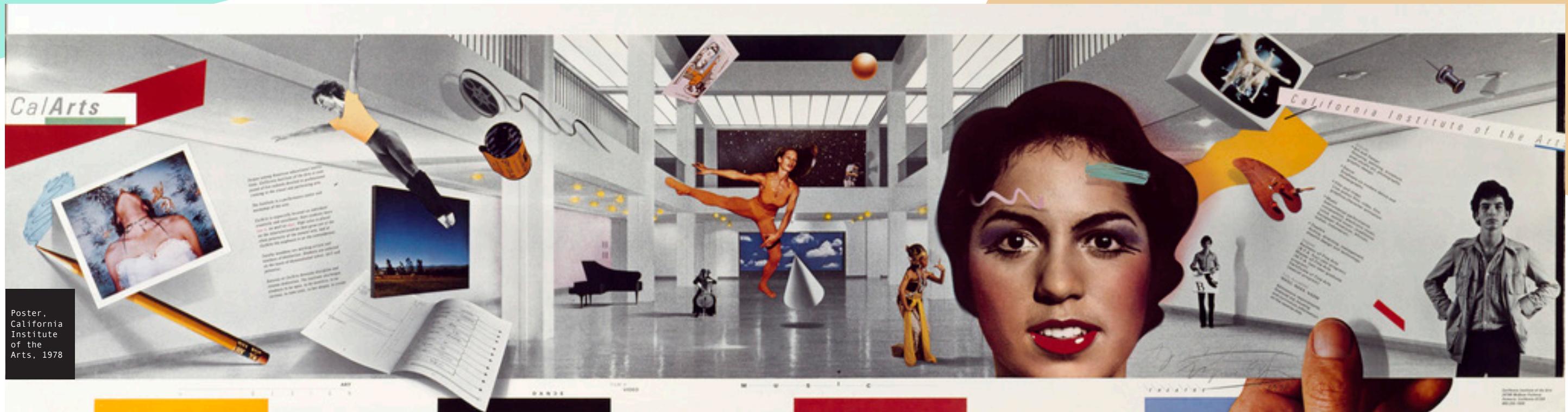
Whenever I encounter fear, I don't flee—I kind of fling myself into deep water and see if I swim.

The most important lesson from her mother came from her often-repeated saying,

**"April, you can't fake the cha-cha."**

From an early age, Greiman learned that **integrity** and **immersion** were critical elements in one's art.

"Her explorations of image, word, and color as objects in time and space are grounded in her singular fusion of art and technology."



Poster,  
California  
Institute  
of the  
Arts, 1978



typograph

Why people didn't  
put typography  
on the diagonal,

I could never figure out.

typograph

Greiman moved to Los Angeles in 1976. During the 1970s, she rejected the belief among many contemporary designers that computers and digitalization would compromise the International Typographic Style; instead, she

**exploited pixelation**  
and other digitization "errors" as integral parts of digital art, a position she has held throughout her career.

The strong thing about that period creatively was that we were combining word and image. Typography, for us, wasn't just a little column at the bottom of the poster or the ad. It was integral, that combination of word and image. Even at Basel,

**I was always thinking of things as objects in space.**

Why people didn't put typography on the diagonal, I could never figure out.

When I got to Basel, instead of continuing on the path of doing Swiss gridded typography, I had the Madman of Typography, [Wolfgang] Weingart, as a teacher. He freed us up to experiment and try different things and

**think about type,**  
not merely

as the little column  
of stuff you put  
at the bottom of a page

or flow  
into a grid system,  
but as something  
that could be

**expressive.**

In a sense, it encouraged me to start to see  
type  
as image.

**Type as image** fully blossomed when we had the tools to do that, like the Macintosh and other technology.

# new wave

Graphic designers laughed at the idea of creating work with a machine rather than their hands. The design community was unanimously opposed to the notion. Greiman decided that she had to convince her colleagues of the tremendous potential of the new medium.

I kind of always resented later being called "Queen of New Wave" or "Pomo." Those aren't anything that I identify with. But then, you know, that's how journalism sometimes goes. I felt like as soon as you've given it a name, it's dead.

**The computer itself was viewed as cold and unfriendly, wildly expensive, and a harbinger of the demise of fine design.**

Greiman refers to the ability to use both technological and classical tools as "staying fluent." In this way, design becomes a language and in order to communicate with this language, it is necessary to be fluent in all its forms.

I was using a lot of color. I was putting type on the diagonal. I was designing pieces that you could turn upside down. For a catalog for a big museum show, I literally trimmed off the corner and made it a trapezoid. Some people realized that there was a thought process and

**there was a concept behind what I was doing.**

But for other people it was just,  
"Where are those Swiss grids?"





**A**pril Greiman was a designer in New York City in the mid-1970s when she decided to leave the comfort of a design community deeply entrenched in European tradition for an uncertain future on the opposite coast. Seeking a new spirit, she moved to Los Angeles and entered a culture that, for better or for worse, had a limited aesthetic of its own at that time. Museums and galleries were few and it was impossible to get a decent cup of coffee. But the lack of an established design practice created a unique opportunity to explore new paradigms in communications design.

After returning from Europe, April Greiman settled in Los Angeles, where she worked as a freelancer and developed her style: the signature layering of type, exaggerated spacing, random collages and geometric shapes. This would eventually cease to be a mere echo of Weingart's Swiss Punk and become her own contribution to West Coastpostmodernism. Soon after she settled in Los Angeles, a friend offered to take her to the desert. "Death Valley?" she said. "Sounds pretty bleak." He dragged her along anyway, and within hours she found herself seduced by the landscape. "The desert is its own educational vehicle," she says. "While most processes occur at an invisible or microscopic level, the desert reveals its evolution in its very existence. I felt as if, for the first time, my eyes were wide open to the process of evolution, to growth, to change."

## "The digital landscape fascinates me in the same way as the desert."

A lot of the work from the '80s I've just started thinking about as a strong body of work. You can really follow a technological thread through my work, from high-end photography, to videography, to computer work, to hybridized design, to motion, to doing things that had sound.

The poster, California Design 2, 1985, was designed by April Greiman and John Coy, with Michael Cronan, Linda Hinrichs, Michael Manwaring, Michael Vanderbyl, and Eric Martin for the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA). The image was created on an Apple Macintosh and is one of the earliest examples of digital design.

AIGA,  
California  
Design 2,  
1985



## Everything is related

and makes  
this wonderful  
loop of interconnection.

*April Greiman*

This publication was designed for DES 322 Computer Graphic Imaging in the Fall of 2019 at San Francisco University.

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