

THE **HISTORY** OF

HERBERT MATTER

A MAN OF MANY TALENTS



Created by
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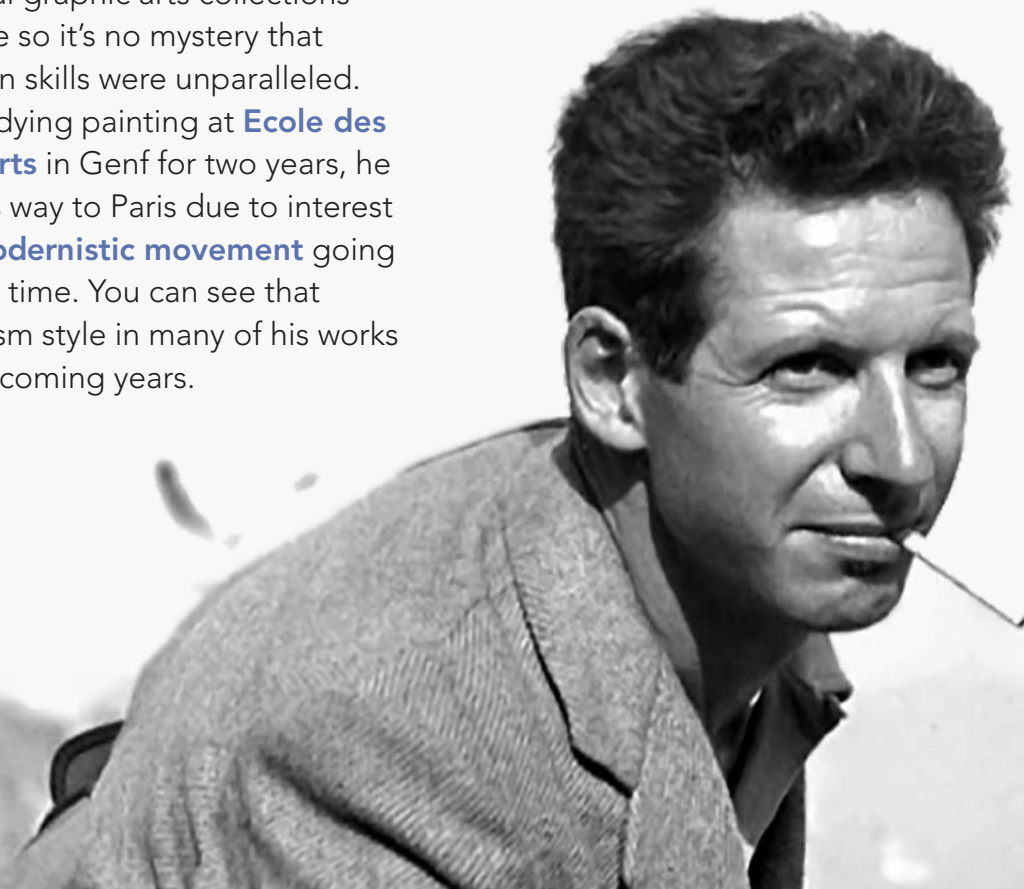
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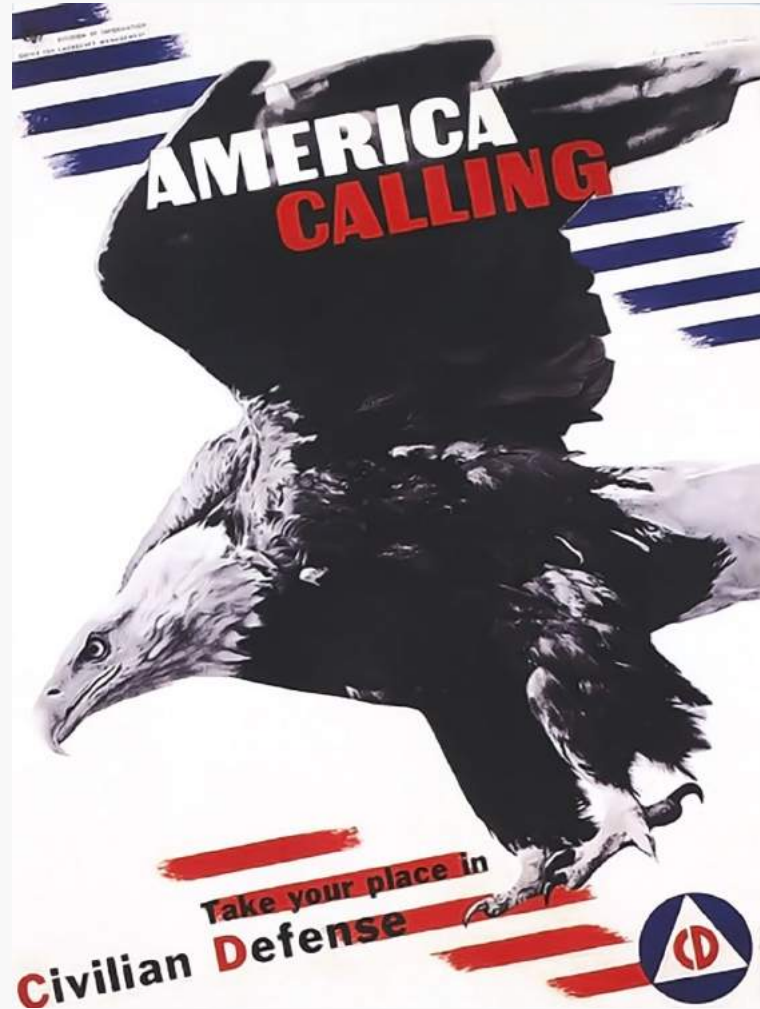
MODERNISM and AVANT-GARDE

Herbert Matter grew up surrounded by several graphic arts collections in Europe so it's no mystery that his design skills were unparalleled. After studying painting at **Ecole des Beaux-Arts** in Genf for two years, he made his way to Paris due to interest in the **modernistic movement** going on at the time. You can see that modernism style in many of his works in the upcoming years.



Avant-garde is how many people see how Matter lived his life, avant-garde being a term used to describe someone who practices unusual ideas through experimentation. Throughout his life, he practiced with many ways of visual representation including film, photography, and design. He worked with manipulating the negatives from his photographs in different ways including cropping and retouching to achieve some amazing outcomes.

Matter was well known for his exceptional use of **photomontage** and **typesetting**. His use of photography mixed with his knowledge and use of typography lead to creating such amazing works as his **Swiss Tourist Group** posters and brochures, cover designs for numerous magazines including **Vogue**, **Harper's Bazaar**, **Fortune**, and even working on branding for a variety of companies.



World War II Poster

1941

PHOTOGRAPHY



PH058

After picking up a Rollei camera in his late twenties, he fell in love with it and began his career in **photography**, **photo manipulation**, and **photomontage**.

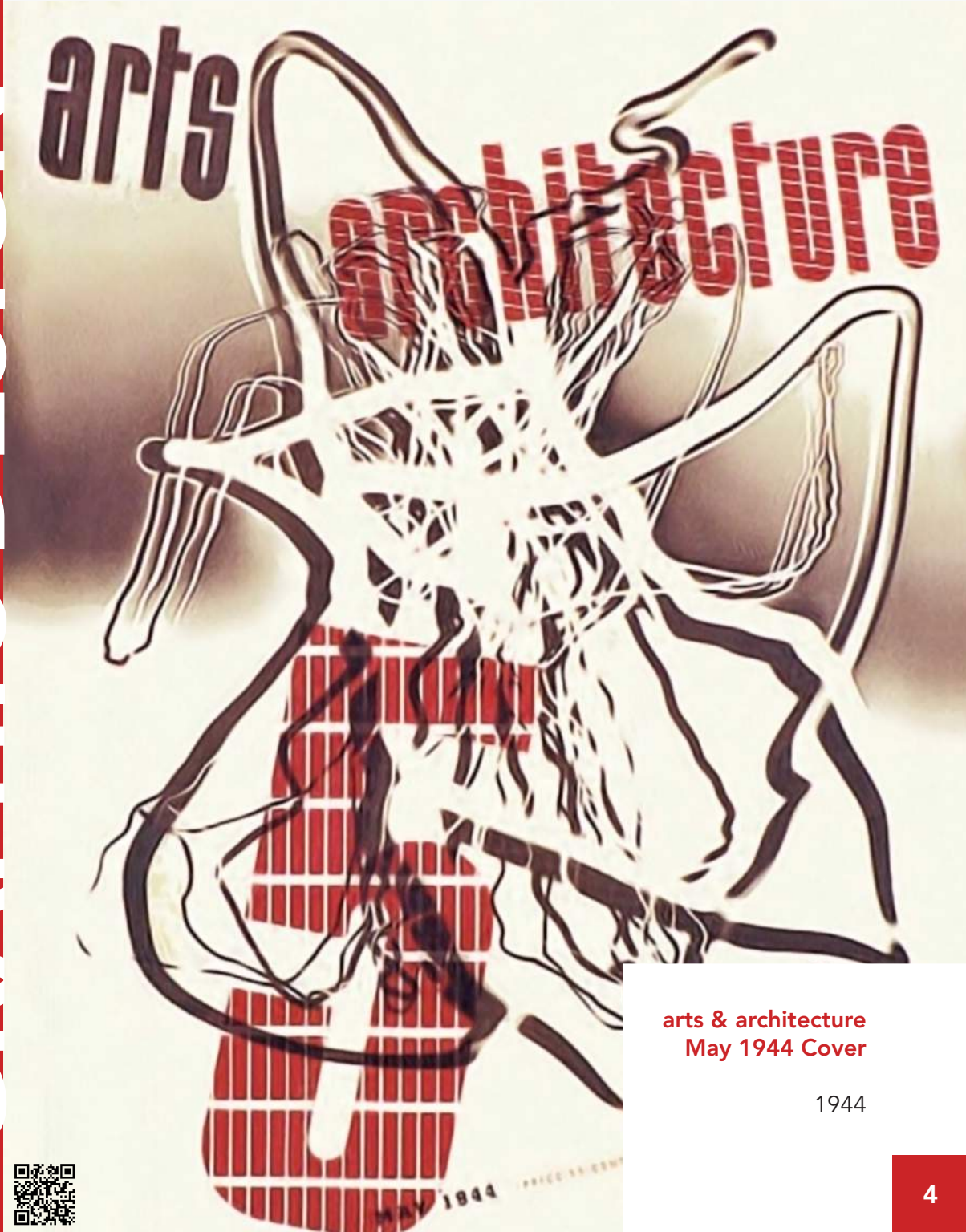
Matter went on to being a photographer for many big name companies at the time including the Swiss Tourist Group, Knoll, Harper's Bazaar, as well as with Yale University. Photo manipulation also played a huge part in many of his graphic design work.

Although Matter focused on photography, **graphic design** played a key role in his career. His design style was sought out by many companies and this gave him a number of opportunities that any person would have dreamed of.

Throughout his life, Matter experimented with many types of graphic design including design work for logos, posters, magazines, and branding.



GRAPHIC DESIGN



arts & architecture
May 1944 Cover

1944



POSTERS

During his employment with the Swiss Tourist Office as a photographer and designer, Matter designed remarkable posters and brochures. These designs were used to effectively communicate a message using his amazing techniques.

The Swiss Tourism posters were just the beginning. Over time, Matter would create posters for many other companies including the 1937 **Zurich Aviation Meeting**, the **Container Corporation of America**, and **Guggenheim**.





Swiss Tourism

1934

Towards the end of a trip throughout the United States, Matter made the decision to stay in New York where he met **Alexey Brodovitch**, the man who offered him a job as a freelance photographer for the magazine Harper's Bazaar. This was the start with his affiliation with magazine companies. Throughout his life, Matter worked on covers for many magazines including arts & architecture, Vogue, Fortune as well as magazine ads for the Container Corporation of America and Knoll. One of which, the **Womb Chair Chimney Sweep Ad**, stayed in circulation in the New York for over thirteen years.

MAGAZINES

Knoll Logo

1950

Knoll Index of
Contemporary Design

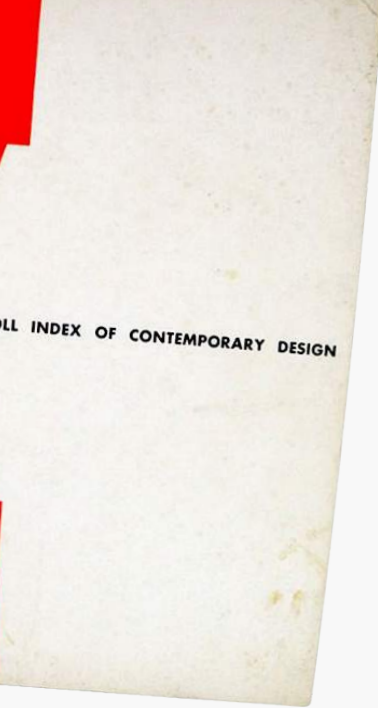
1950

BRANDING KNOLLEDGE

After creating a number of visually astounding posters for the Container Corporation of America during World War II, Matter was appointed the lead consultant for design and advertising at **Knoll**. He established a **20 year relationship** with Knoll and created many works ranging from photography and magazine advertisements to catalogue and logo designs. Over time of his employment, Matter used his visual style to create a new identity for the company.

His expert design skill was well received which lead him to get the opportunity to rebrand several other companies using his skill set. In the end he left his mark in other companies including several rail road companies and museums.





New Haven Railroad's corporate identity in 1952. He was appointed the design consultant to the company and was in charge of designing a new logo, a monogram with elongated serifs, and a branding campaign. Unlike his previous photomontage focused designs, he focused mainly on typography with the New Haven Railroad identity.

The new "**NH**" logo lead to being one of the most recognized symbols in America. Later, Matter was also assigned to be a design head at the **Boston and Maine Railroad** where he designed a symbol and styling program.

FILM

After his departure with Knoll, Matter experimented with **cinematography**. During 1949 he directed a color film featuring **Alexander Calder** and **Alex Matter** titled "**The Works of Calder**".

After that film was completed, he produced a set of dance films in black and white titled "**The Spirit Moves**" and "**Dancing with Mura Dehn**".



**Boston and Maine
Railroad Logo**

1940



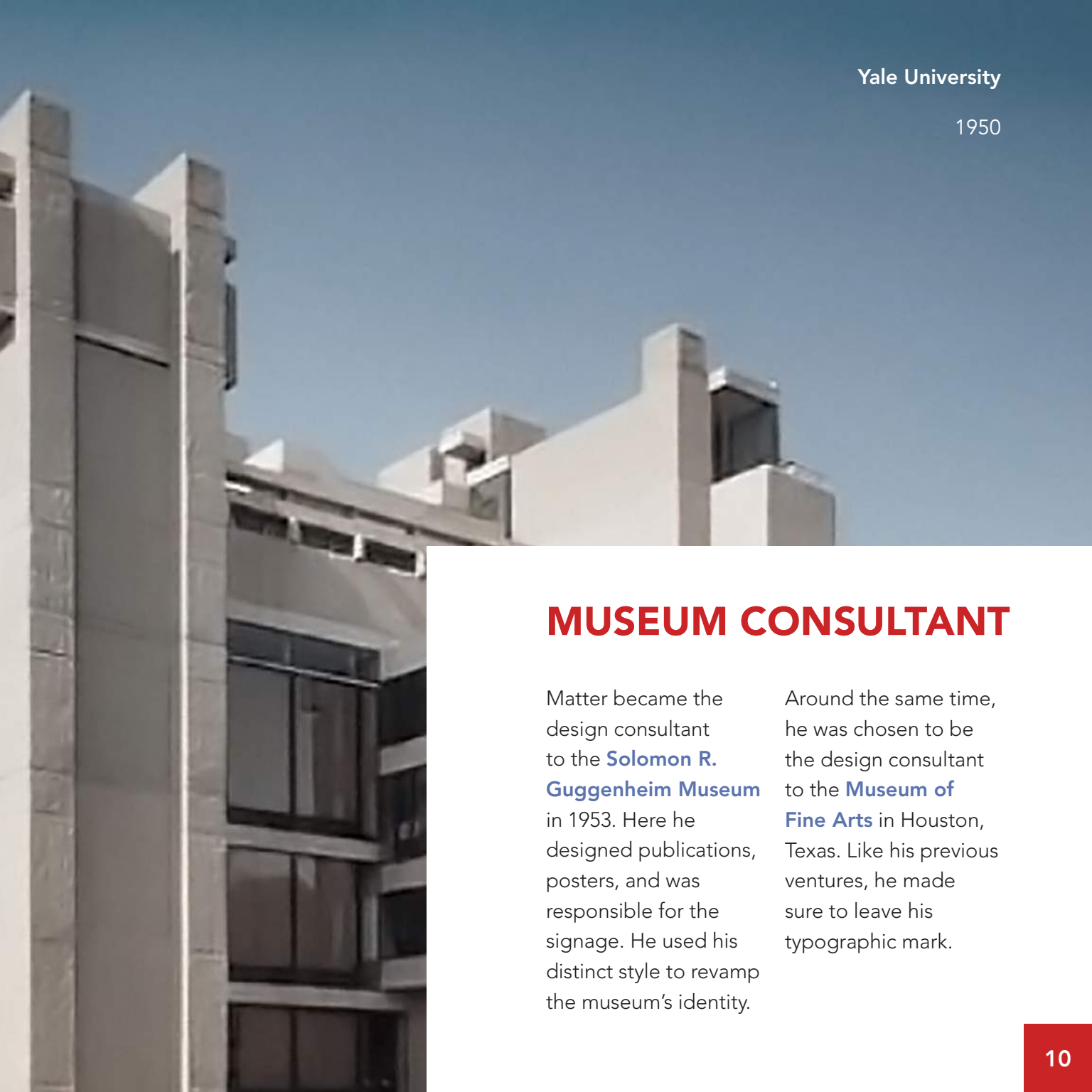
YALE UNIVERSITY

During the time of the New Haven Railroad rebrand, Matter was appointed by **Alvin Eisenman** to be a **visiting critic** in photography at **Yale University**, School of Art and Architecture in New Haven, Connecticut.

Around this time, he experimented in architecture design. Matter designed studio spaces in buildings designed by **Louis Kahn** and **Paul Rudolf**.

About a century later, he was appointed as a **professor** of Graphic Design at Yale where it is said that "his roster of students included some of the most important names in the field today."





MUSEUM CONSULTANT

Matter became the design consultant to the **Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum** in 1953. Here he designed publications, posters, and was responsible for the signage. He used his distinct style to revamp the museum's identity.

Around the same time, he was chosen to be the design consultant to the **Museum of Fine Arts** in Houston, Texas. Like his previous ventures, he made sure to leave his typographic mark.



A LEGACY THAT MATTERS

In 1983 he was given the honor of being a **Medalist of The American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA)** for his contribution to the progress of photography and design. It is sad to say that this creative designer passed away in 1984, soon after he was bestowed this honor. Although a great man was lost, his legacy still lives on. Since his passing, there have been several exhibitions dedicated to not only his design work, but his photography as well.

In 2010, a documentary titled **"The Visual Language of Herbert Matter"** was released, detailing Matter's life and design style. This movie contains a lot of information that can't be found anywhere else.

Throughout his life, Matter leaned most of his focus on modernism and avant-garde leading him to create extremely unique and widely recognized designs that survive to this day as exceptional design work. His magnificent work also lead him to earn the respect of the design community. "The absence of pomposity was characteristic of this guy" said **Paul Rand** who was a friend of his for four decades. Matter's experimentation with photography and typography allowed the design community to reach a whole new level that may not have even been possible without his imaginative style.

"Poem"
Yale Exhibition Catalogue

1977



"Herbert Matter is a magician.
To satisfy the needs of industry, that's what you have to be.
Industry is a tough taskmaster.
Art is tougher.
Industry plus Art, almost impossible.
Some artists have done the impossible.
Herbert Matter, for example.
His work of '32 could have been done in '72 or even '82.
It has that timeless, unerring quality one recognizes instinctively.
It speaks to all tongues, with one tongue.
It is uncomplicated, to the point, familiar, and yet unexpected.
Something brought to light, an image, a surprise, an analogy.
It is believable, as it is unbelievable.
It always has an idea, the one you almost thought of.
It may be formal or anecdotal, full of sentiment, but not sentimental.
It is commercial; it is contemplative.
It enhances the quality of life.
It is Art."

- Paul Rand

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AIGA

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The Visual Language
of Herbert Matter

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Knoll Womb Chair Ad

1955