

Seoul, South Korea—*Kwangchul Kim*



Kwangchul Kim, born in Chuncheon (north of Seoul), is the publisher and editor in chief of GRAPHIC. GRAPHIC is a graphic magazine published in Seoul, Korea. The magazine, first published in January 2007, focuses on graphic design trends that are different from the mainstream and on the phenomena thereof. Its editorial policy is defined by an in-depth approach to one theme per issue. GRAPHIC is an independent magazine and does not depend on sponsors or any governmental organizations for financial help, but rather aims at more creative and independent journalism by emancipating its own editorship from them. graphicmag.kr

Introducing the cultural context

Ingo Offermanns: Kwangchul Kim, what is an inspiring place for you in Seoul?

Kwangchul Kim: There is a district called Hongdae (Hongik University) in Seoul. It is well-known for being the center of indie culture as well as the birth place of youth culture. A miniature version of Korean culture, I'd say. It's a place that allows opposites to coexist, such as beauty and ugliness, art and commercial, artists and philistines, creators and bystanders. I'm inspired by this in many aspects, most of all by the fact that there you can find the most innovative and banal things densely living together. The *GRAPHIC* office is located on the edge of Hongdae where a lot of other publishers are located as well. Just by observing their publishing activities, I get inspired in many ways. Even by their outfits.

What about Seoul in general? Is it a good city for graphic designers?

Probably. Even though it is still limited to the cultural sector, the need for graphic design is definitely increasing, and the view upon it is transforming more inclusively. The entry barrier is next to nothing, and people are ready to work with new talents. From huge public institutions to nameless alternative spaces, there are more clients than ever in Seoul who seriously need graphic design, especially in the last few years. I know that many of the designers who have collaborated with those clients were low-paid, but in return, they can promote their activities throughout the autonomous design practice. I think the notion of the importance of graphic design in the curation scene was crucial for this phenomenon.

Why is this the case?

Young Korean curators seek out "young" graphics designers to whom they can actually attune themselves. That is because they no longer want to work with the established

design firms (the so-called Design Agencies), who tend to charge overly expensive fees and tend not to seek newness or crave originality. In my opinion, the curators seem to know that young, emerging graphic designers can be a great partner to introduce artists and promote their work. It's only been 5 years or so, but we're undergoing a generational shift at a rattling pace.

What about Korean pride? Are Koreans proud people?

Personally I have a strong aversion to nationalism or collectivism, so I actually don't have any pride whatsoever as a Korean. Korea is a dynamic society in terms of politics. Of course, I am proud as a human being for the democratization that people attained by themselves a few decades ago, but not necessarily as a Korean.



What are the typical characteristics of Korean mentality?

Generally speaking, collectivism—as the opposite of individualism—is relatively dominant in Korea, which surely comes from historical experiences. It is such a small land with lots of people, so its overpopulation also causes “over-socialization”, a typical Korean mentality. What is clear is that people here care too much about what others think and tend not to go against others' expectations. The Korean War, a tragedy of the Cold War, also still affects the people. Korean society is still not quite flexible ideologically.

What aspects of Korean culture could be a role model for others?



A few months ago, a Japanese bookseller told me that it takes Japanese people a lot of time and consideration to figure out how to open up a single bookstore, which often distresses them or makes it difficult for them to even start out, but it seems like Koreans open a bookstore first and start to think later. I guess this is a positive aspect of Korean culture—being able to adapt themselves to new things with ease, and being quite bold and adventurous in performing their work. Maybe *GRAPHIC* is one of the byproducts of this culture. If I had considered for too long, I would never have been able to start at all.

Next to Korean culture, what other cultures are important for South Korean society?

As a teenager, I was flooded with American culture: Clint Eastwood, Dustin Hoffman, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix,

etc. After getting out of school, I worked at an advertising agency for about 10 years. In this time, I was strongly influenced by Japanese culture. I used to eat sushi for dinner, then go to an izakaya for a drink, and stop by karaoke for entertainment. Being swept away with American culture was a global thing, but everyday life in Korea has been soaked in Japanese culture since the 80s.

Introducing the person

What is the most touching, most beautiful thing you've ever seen?

I was 11, a 5th grader maybe, when I saw the ocean for the first time. The horizon was blurry with fog and mist. It was just too vast.

Does beauty play an important role in your life?

For me, beauty means “purity”, which is simple, clear, and not polluted. I am drawn by it, especially because I am neither pure nor able to be pure.

What topics or ideas are you fascinated by at the moment?

Sometimes I imagine myself 10 years from now, as an old man in my mid-60s, working on some chimerical projects. I am somehow thrilled to be an old man who challenges the system, the mainstream, and conventions. The idea not to adapt myself to the given system is very important for me, and gives me a reason to live.

What do you expect from life?

To be honest, I would maybe like to gain some kind of an honour—not a kind of mondaine social recognition, but something eccentric and impertinent. I am becoming more and more like that.

What does life expect from you in South Korea?

I am a magazine editor, a husband, a father, and a son of a single mother as well. My life constantly requires “responsibility”. I should be responsible for a magazine, a publishing house, and a family. I feel a lot of pressure, but it is something that I am willing to accept. Except for taking the responsibility for my family, I think I do pretty well. Fortunately, my family doesn't care that much about me... (Laughs)

What was your dream career as a child?

When I was a kid, I remember a fortuneteller telling me, “You will become a soldier and succeed as one”. My father was a retired officer and looking at his picture on the battleground, it somehow made me sad, but the soldier’s world also seemed quite fascinating. I liked the idea that soldiers runs up and down mountains defending themselves, but I also once thought about the agony and the loneliness that a soldier would have. I don’t know why.

Why did you become a publisher in the end?

Maybe because I thought it was better to fight for my ideas as a publisher than for my country as a soldier. Through publishing I can gather intriguing people and introduce their ideas, visions, and attitudes to Korean society. What is good about publishing is that it is not a game of capital, but a game of thoughts and ideas. You can make a small universe with trivial yet interesting stories. This is the charm of publishing.

Working life

What’s your typical work day like?

I start at the office at 10 in the morning and finish at midnight. This means I spend more than 10 hours a day in the office, plus weekends are not an exception. It is not necessary to do so but it kind of became a habit or lifestyle. The GRAPHIC magazine consumes about 30% of my time; the rest is for publishing other books. Most of the day, I stay in the office doing editorial work, but sometimes I also visit the printing houses or galleries.

When putting together an issue of GRAPHIC magazine, how does your idea finding process work?

It’s an ongoing process of constant research and exchanging ideas regularly with collaborators. It has become more like a routine rather than preparing for a certain issue of GRAPHIC. We try to spot an uncommonness that can stimulate the readers at the same time. I prefer a subject that can be small in itself but naturally speak to a bigger concept, than a greater subject from the beginning.

What are the compromise you have to make as a publisher?

That I have to deal with limited resources, which means limited budget and manpower. It is quite a realistic problem. However, I don't have to compromise in terms of themes or ideas. That's because we are a small team, which allows our projects to keep some distance from commerciality.

Who do you get your feedback from?

I don't trust individual feedback so much. People tend not to be harsh face to face, so I prefer feedback via social media.

Attitude

○ *Min Choi said that you are a walking encyclopedia for graphic design. Why are you so fascinated by graphic design?*

I guess I'm more fascinated by the magazine as a dynamic yet intense means of communication. Obviously, graphic design plays a big role for this type of publication. For this reason, when I was an editor at a film magazine, I wanted to deepen my knowledge about the fundamentals of magazine and graphic communication. And that's why I started GRAPHIC magazine. Graphic design seems very dependent on the individual talent of a graphic designer rather than relying on its system. That is to say, graphic design is a world of human scale, which fascinates me the most.

○ *Do you need to be educated to understand graphic design?*

I am one of the ones concerned about the over-elitised part in graphic design. I think graphic design should be more democratized. Design should consider the people who are uneducated and be able to mediate to a broader public.

What are the qualities of a good graphic designer in your opinion?

Any design that is understandable, without fallacy in delivering information, and looks good. I would consider it great if its method or style is also original and breaks conventions.

What's more important for you, the design product or the process?

The product. But I mean the printed content, not primarily the magazine as an object. The content should be the center of attention when handling the object. That's why I like when the design helps structure and enhance the content.

Are there any meta themes that South Korean graphic designers are busy with?

I would say "independence". The old generation of graphic designers was rather passive and felt comfortable within the hierarchies and structures of Korean society. But the younger generation questions these structures and strives for more independence. The younger generation wants to express their thoughts in order to actively contribute and change society. So, next to designing, they're starting to become authors, generate their own contents, and open independent businesses and small publishing houses.

What is the most hypocritical thing that a designer can say?

(Laughs) That design is not important.

What is the most hypocritical thing that a publisher can say?

(Laughs) That she or he doesn't care about money.

Can graphic design change society?

Probably. I'd like to postulate the possibility to change the society as a broader concept. These days "change" means not as much transformation as before, but as stated earlier, graphic design helps the younger generation to develop a voice in society.

If you were a dictator in the world of graphic design, what ideas would you insist on?

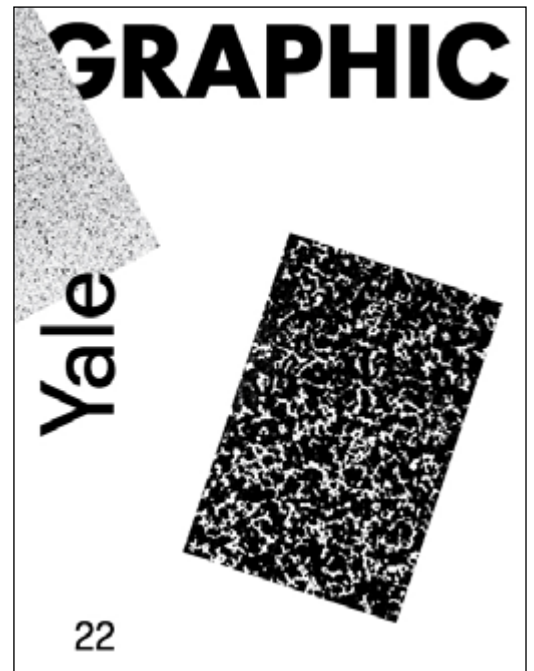
I really dislike some of the old design "authorities"—designers who built up a sacrosanct position in the scene. I would like to make them reside in a senior citizens center (Laughs).

Have you ever lost your beliefs?

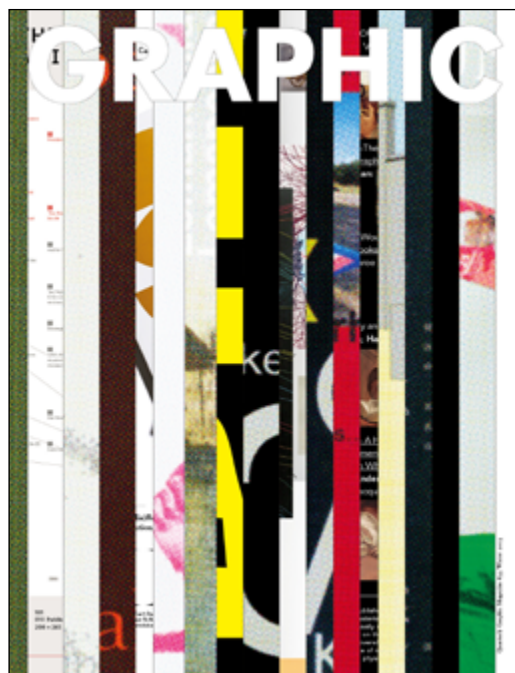
Fortunately not. Having a strong publishing concept and being flexible as a small publishing house keeps me on track and allows me to take inspiring detours and healthy sidesteps.

Type Archive Issue: A. Type Specimen	타입 아카이브 이슈: A. 서체 견본	A	B
Adelle	아델	8	8
Adso	에드소	14	12
Alwyn New	알윈 뉴	20	14
Apud	아푸드	26	16
Arietta	아리엠타	32	18
FS Blake	FS블레이크	38	22
Book	북	44	24
LL Brown	LL브라운	50	26
Burbank	버뱅크	56	28
Circular	서클러	62	30
Eames Century Modern	에스 센추리 모던	68	32
Elido	엘리도	76	34
Euclid Bold	유클리드 볼드	82	36
Executive	익집큐티브	88	40
Founders Grotesk	파운더스 그로테스크	94	42
Friska	프리스카	100	44
Graphik	그래픽	106	46
History	히스토리	112	48
Kina	키나	118	50
Larish Neue	라리시 노이에	124	52
Lettera-Txt	레테라 텍스트	130	54
Lirico Pro	리리코 프로	136	56
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Lyon	리온	148	60
MAD	매드	154	64

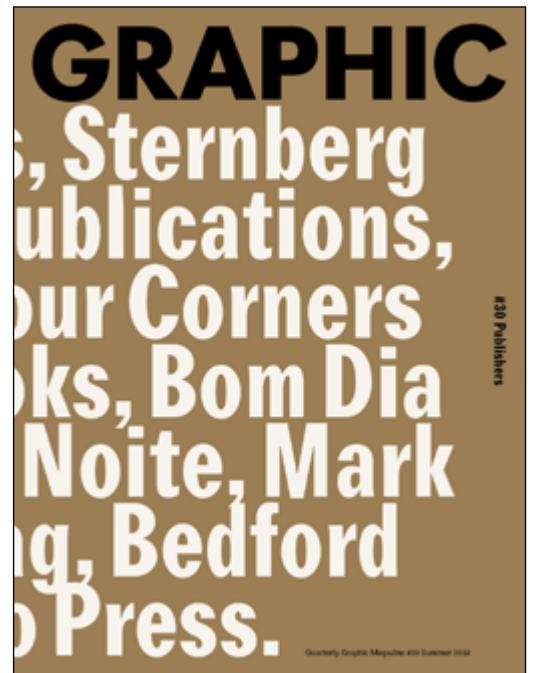
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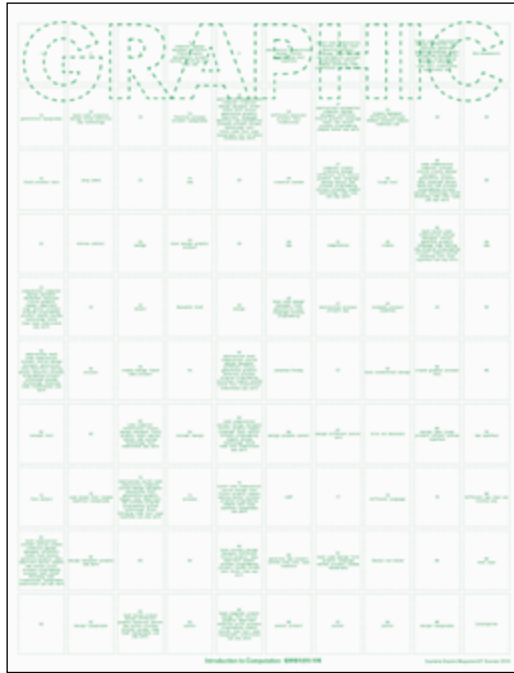
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Design: Yale School of Art Graphic Design



Title: (#35) BOOK DESIGNS
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Title: (#30) PUBLISHERS
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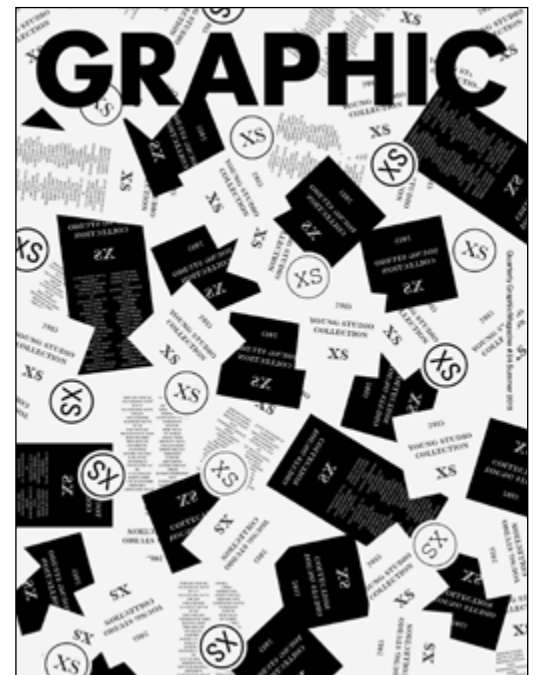
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Title: (#39) POSTER ISSUE 2016
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Design: Shin Dokho



Title: (#24) THE SUBJECTIVE TOUR GUIDE TO
AMSTERDAM
Year: 2012
Format: 230x300mm
Design: Na Kim



Title: (#34) XS: YOUNG STUDIO COLLECTION
Year: 2015
Format: 230x300mm
Design: Shin Dokho

Inter Graphic View is a research project by Ingo Offermanns,
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Ingo Offermanns met with Kwangchul Kim in Seoul.

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