

reputations; others you've not yet heard of. The selection is highly personal, with criteria known only to the photographers, the publishers and perhaps Alan Twigg, whose database at [www.abcbookworld.com](http://www.abcbookworld.com) contains more than 10,000 B.C.-related writers. Here we have one percent of those. If we are patient, there may yet be time for at least some of the 99.

Book launches and partial exhibitions are scheduled on Vancouver Island and elsewhere in B.C. through the winter of 2012–13. At time of writing, Fertig and Haase were looking for a big city venue to show all 111 portraits.

Reviewed by *Phyllis Reeve*



## The Book of Books: 500 Years of Graphic Innovation

Edited by *Mathieu Lommen* (Thames & Hudson, 2011, \$68)

IF YOU, LIKE ME, were unable to get to Amsterdam this spring to see the exhibition *The Printed Book: A Visual History* at the University of Amsterdam, I suggest you order the book produced to accompany the exhibition.

The intent of *The Book of Books: 500 Years of Graphic Innovation* is “to showcase book design in all its forms: reference works, and works of

art, ‘machines for reading’ and picture books, prestigious collector’s items and throw away paperbacks.” In this, the book is a success. The books featured are significant, the commentary on them is insightful, and the design by Cees W. de Jong is a perfect match.

The exhibition that gave rise to the book drew from the holdings of the Special Collections of the University of Amsterdam. The library originated in 1578, and more recently the University of Amsterdam established the Heritage Centre for Graphic Design, Typography and Advertising. While it is not clear to what extent this book mirrors the actual exhibition, the book stands on its own. Save for a reference in the postscript, the exhibition is not mentioned at all.

The book is the combined effort of seven people associated with the University of Amsterdam: Mathieu Lommen, the editor, plus Paul Dijstelberge, Frans A. Janssen, Cees W. de Jong, John A. Lane, Lesley Monfils, Adriaan Plak, Jan W. H. Werner and Johan de Zoete. Their credentials are set out and they are impressive.

They have chosen 128 books whose dates of publication range from 1471 to 2010. The book is organized on a chronological basis into nine sections: The invention and spread of printing; Decoration and Illustration; The Dutch Golden Age; The Eighteenth Century; Nineteenth-century Graphic Techniques; Private Presses and Traditional Book Typography; Avant-garde and New Typography; Modernism and Swiss Typography; and Postmodernism. Each section has a brief introduction written by one of the contributors.

This book is modern in its design. The type used is *Avenir Next*, a sans serif face designed by Adrian Frutiger. The book’s introduction and the introductions to the sections are set in what appears to be a bold version of this face set well led. In contrast, the title of each section is set in a regular weight and placed at the beginning of the first line of the text of the introduction. Throughout, the commentary on each individual book is set in the regular weight.

The book is 464 pages with a page size of 31.9 by 22.7 centimetres. Many images of the featured books appear to be reproduced at actual size and in colours closely approximating the originals. The illustrations do not reduce the commentary; at least one double-page spread is devoted to each book and often two or three such spreads. The first spread

has a bibliographic description of the book and a commentary on its design features. Reproductions of pages from the book also appear. For the earlier works the spread includes a picture of the binding and in all cases an enlarged reproduction of a portion of a text page with additional comment devoted to the type used.

The outlook of the book is international but Western-based, with examples from many European countries and the United States. No books designed in Canada are included. One aspect of this book that struck me forcefully and pleased me greatly was the inclusion of so many modern European designers.

The book's introduction observes that the 20th-century aesthetic canon was developed primarily in the English-speaking world, with particular influence from the British typographer Stanley Morison (especially his *Four Centuries of Fine Printing* [1924], revised under the title *The Typographic Book, 1450–1935* [1963]). When compared to Morison's book and others that set out to survey printing and book design over a similar span of time, *The Book of Books* includes a greater number of modern and also European designers without sacrificing representation of designers from the earlier years.

*The Book of Books* devotes 150 of its 464 pages to the period 1919 to 2010 in the three sections Avant-garde and New Typography, Modernism and Swiss Typography, and Postmodernism—46 books by 46 designers, out of a total of 128 books. We are shown the work of Fernand Léger, El Lissitzky, Piet Zwart, Jan Tschichold, Herbert Bayer, Marie Neurath, Paul Rand, Wim Crowel and Irma Bloom, among others

The reader is also provided with a four-page list of books for “Further Reading” and an index of “punchcutters, typefounders, typefaces, type and book designers, craftsmen, artists, printers, publishers and some related subjects.” The table of contents lists printers and designers. The one flaw is that the book fails to provide a list of the books discussed either in the index or the table of contents

This is not an inexpensive book, especially when you factor in the shipping charges (it is big and heavy), but it is well worth the price. *The Book of Books* should be on the shelves of anyone who is interested in design and wants to be able to have at hand an in-depth survey of design through the years. I am very pleased that I added this book to my library.

