

# The 2002 Relaunch of the Swiss Design Awards: Key Changes and their Influence on Designers' Careers and Networks

## Introduction

2002 brought the relaunch of the Swiss Design Awards (SDA) under a new guise. These awards, which represent the most important vector of design promotion in Switzerland,<sup>1</sup> were reorganised by the Swiss Federal Office of Culture (SFOC) in a bid to reflect changes in design practice and to provide better professional support to designers.<sup>2</sup> Entitled *Netzwerke / Réseaux / Networks*, the 2002 awards positioned the SFOC as a mediator – a node in a wider network of design – leading it to adopt a more active approach to promotion. For instance, the SFOC decided to set an example by commissioning young designers for its publications, including that year's SDA catalogue. It was more substantial than previous editions and investigated both the role of networks in the production of design, and the place of the SFOC itself.

A century after their inception, the SDA arguably play a vital role on the Swiss design scene today. They provide financial support – CHF 25 000 to each winner – and public recognition. Their yearly exhibition, held during Art Basel, enjoys a high level of visibility: this year, no less than 11 090 visitors came to see the five-day show.<sup>3</sup> Winning an SDA has become the highest accolade for graphic designers in Switzerland. However, neither the evolution of the prizes in the years leading up to their 2002 reorganisation, nor the impact of the 2002 awards on the careers and networks of designers, has hitherto been discussed thoroughly. My PhD thesis aims to explore these issues. It will focus on three

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- 1 In this paper, design promotion is understood to encompass the four activities currently defined by the Swiss Federal Department of Home Affairs: encouraging exceptional cultural creation, awarding cultural actors, promoting these actors, and increasing the general public's awareness of the cultural scene. *Ordonnance du DFI instituant un régime d'encouragement en matière de Prix suisses, de Grands Prix suisses et d'acquisitions pour les années 2017 à 2020*, RS 442.123, 2016.
  - 2 Patrizia Crivelli: *Eidgenössische Preise für Gestaltung 1999 = Prix fédéraux des arts appliqués 1999 = Premi federali delle arti applicate 1999*, Bern: Bundesamt für Kultur 1999; Patrizia Crivelli: "Design Promotion as a Network", in: Patrizia Crivelli (ed.): *Swiss Design 2002. Netzwerke / Réseaux / Networks*, Baden: Lars Müller 2002, pp. 170f.; Lorette Coen/Patrizia Crivelli: "A or B – Take Your Pick", in: Stéphanie Bédat (ed.): *Swiss Design 2003: Désir Design*, Bern: Bundesamt für Kultur 2003, pp. 9–11.
  - 3 Swiss Federal Office of Culture: 11 090 Visitori, *Swiss Design Awards Journal*, 17 June 2018, <http://swissdesignawardsblog.ch/news/000-visitatori>. By way of comparison, the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich received 40 344 visitors in 2017. Simone Hellmüller/Simone Wildhaber (eds.): *Museum für Gestaltung Zürich: Jahresbericht 2017*, Zurich: Museum für Gestaltung 2018, p. 62.

periods in the career of three 2002 winners – the years preceding their award, the SDA’s direct consequences for them, and their later career development – and analyse the production of graphic design from the perspective of networks. This approach allows for a detailed enquiry that encompasses changes in education and models of practice, while drawing a broader picture of the evolution of the Swiss design scene. Furthermore, it shows the role played by key actors who are not graphic designers, such as the contributions of curators, editors, photographers, and gatekeepers in companies and institutions. My thesis sets out to answer the following questions: how and where do these networks form, and what influences them? In what way do these connections have an impact on the production of graphic design in Switzerland? Finally, how can they be investigated with the aim of producing a history that goes beyond isolated designers and objects to reveal less prominent auxiliary figures and the complexity of design creation?

This article focuses on the evolution of the approach to Swiss design promotion in the years preceding its reorganisation in 2002. We argue that the aim of design promotion evolved from encouraging economic growth to fostering cultural capital, and we identify both the factors that led the SFOC to this change, and the effect it had on graphic design practices. Because the SFOC explicitly defined itself as a node in the network of Swiss design in 2002, we then analyse its impact on the practice and networks of three winners of the 2002 awards, Gilles Gavillet, Megi Zumstein, and Norm (*aka* Manuel Krebs and Dimitri Bruni). We shall retrace several of the connections that have played a role in the creation of design, and analyse the role played by the SDA within the Swiss scene. We conclude that, although the awards redefined themselves as an actor in the network, their reorganisation was more of an acknowledgement of this than a complete change in their role.

## Shifting aims: from encouraging economic growth to fostering culture

In December 1917, the Swiss parliament tasked the Federal Department of Home Affairs (FDHA) specifically with encouraging “decorative and industrial” applied arts,<sup>4</sup> and in 1918 the first federal bursary within that framework was granted. The main argument for supporting the field was that it would contribute to economic growth. The government’s view was shared by professional associations such as the Schweizerischer Werkbund (SWB) and L’Oeuvre (OEV), which were influential in defining the politics of design promotion.<sup>5</sup> All the actors on the design promotion scene perceived the social and cultural functions of design as something of secondary importance.<sup>6</sup> This perspective remained unchanged for several decades. For example, the OEV’s statutory aims between 1917 and the 1950s were to reinforce first the economic, then the social role of applied arts.<sup>7</sup> The OEV’s primary tool for promotion was organising competitions on behalf of private and public bodies that would allow the winning designers to

4 *Arrêté fédéral du 18 décembre 1917 concernant le développement des arts appliqués (arts décoratifs et industriels)*, RS 4 221, 1917.

5 Andreas Münch: “Art ou Design? La Confédération et les arts appliqués”, in: Patrizia Crivelli/Köbi Gantenbein/Barbara Imboden/Andreas Münch (eds.): *Made in Switzerland: Gestaltung – 80 Jahre Förderung durch die Eidgenossenschaft*, Bern: Bundesamt für Kultur 1997, pp. 88–110.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 90; Rudolf Schilling: “Promotion du Design, Promotion Économique!”, in: Crivelli/Gantenbein/Imboden/Münch: *Made in Switzerland*, pp. 184–189, here p. 184.

7 Antoine Baudin: “Quelques repères pour une histoire de l’association L’Œuvre (1913–1963)”, in: Crivelli/Gantenbein/Imboden/Münch: *Made in Switzerland*, pp. 116–127, here p. 116.

expand their client base.<sup>8</sup> While the government had no long-term strategy in place, the understanding of design promotion as a tool for economic growth was perceptible. For instance, in the 1950s, a series of travelling poster exhibitions was organised by Pro Helvetia in collaboration with the Swiss Office of the Development of Trade,<sup>9</sup> rather than with the Federal Commission of Applied Arts.<sup>10</sup> Design promotion was thus synonymous with economic promotion.

While at first the SWB and the OEV were instrumental in defining the politics of design promotion, the Swiss Confederation gradually distanced itself from these associations and increasingly became the most influential actor in design promotion. In the 1970s, an expert commission was formed to advise the government on cultural policy. The report subsequently published by the commission in 1975 was the first document to engage in extensive reflection on the role of the public sector in the field of culture.<sup>11</sup> That same year, the Federal Office of Cultural Affairs was created and became responsible for design promotion. In 1978, it was renamed the Federal Office of Culture.<sup>12</sup> 1975 thus marks the beginning of a definite cultural policy strategy by the government. The fact that design promotion was conferred to the SFOC signalled a move away from the idea that supporting design would be a determining factor in encouraging economic growth. Instead, design promotion was now perceived as belonging to the cultural field.

Over the decades following its creation, the SFOC increasingly took over design promotion. This contributed to widening the gap between professional associations and state-organised promotion. In the 1990s, the former no longer perceived the various promotional tools of the SFOC, such as the Most Beautiful Swiss Books, the Swiss Design Awards, and the Swiss Poster Award, as compatible with their interests.<sup>13</sup> From 1991 onwards, the participation of the SWB in design competitions organised by the FDHA was explicitly called into question, and its support was later withdrawn.<sup>14</sup> The split became even clearer in 1997 when the SFOC took over the Most Beautiful Swiss Books competition and ruled out the influence of trade organisations on the jury. At the same time, it shifted the focus of the award to recognising design rather than technical qualities.<sup>15</sup> In the early 2000s, the Swiss Poster Award was also subject to tensions between the

8 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

9 Usually known as Office Suisse d'Expansion Commerciale (OSEC) and today named the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO).

10 The economic role played by the poster exhibition is being explored by Sara Zeller in her PhD thesis at the Graduate School of the Arts. Sara Zeller: "The Best Posters of the Year: Creating Jobs, Promoting the Economy or Representing Switzerland?", unpublished paper presented to *Swiss Graphic Design and Typography Revisited Experts' Panel Meeting*, Zurich, 3–5 May 2018; Sara Zeller: "Travelling Image: Internationale Wanderausstellungen von Schweizer Plakaten in den 1950er und 1960er Jahren", unpublished paper presented at *GSA-Forschungstag*, Bern, 14 December 2017.

11 Gaston Clottu (ed.): *Beiträge für eine Kulturpolitik in der Schweiz*, Bern: [n. p.] 1975.

12 Patrizia Crivelli/Barbara Imboden: "80 ans d'encouragement: Aperçu chronologique", in: Crivelli/Gantenbein/Imboden/Münch: *Made in Switzerland*, pp. 59–87.

13 Leonhard Fünfschilling (ed.): *Der Gestaltungswettbewerb: Kulturinstrument, Modemacher oder Alibi?*, Zurich: Schweizerischer Werkbund 1991 (SWB-Dokument 1).

14 Thomas Gnägi: "Grafikdesign: Zwischen avantgardistischem Anspruch und Angemessenheit", in: Thomas Gnägi/Bernd Nicolai/Jasmine Wohlwend Piai (eds.): *Gestaltung Werk Gesellschaft: 100 Jahre Schweizerischer Werkbund SWB*, Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess 2013, pp. 251–270, here p. 266.

15 Michael Guggenheimer: "Beautiful Swiss Books: Examples and Trends over the Past Six Decades", in: Mirjam Fischer (ed.): *Beauty and the Book: 60 Jahre "Die schönsten Schweizer Bücher"*, Sulgen: Niggli 2004, pp. 80–98; Roland Früh: "Synopsis", in: *Beauty and the Book*, pp. 122–142.

cultural and commercial sectors. The Allgemeine Plakatgesellschaft | Société Générale d’Affichage took over the competition, rescinding its 61 years of collaboration with the SFOC, as it felt that the latter privileged cultural posters over the advertising sector.<sup>16</sup> These two acts of reorganisation confirmed the SFOC’s new perception of the role of design promotion – fostering culture instead of encouraging economic growth.

## Factors leading to the 2002 reorganisation of the Swiss Federal Awards

As with the other instruments of promotion mentioned above, the SDA’s role was progressively reconsidered in the decade preceding the 2002 reorganisation of the awards. During the 1990s, *Hochparterre*, the main architecture and design magazine in Switzerland, was highly critical of the SDA. It regretted that the experimental projects submitted for the awards were too rarely encouraged, believing instead that the awards went to “safe” choices, such as to projects that took no risks, or to established designers who had already won before.<sup>17</sup> It called on the SDA to create categories additional to the existing ones (jewellery, graphics, ceramics, and so on) in order to reflect new practices such as interface design or service design.<sup>18</sup> The magazine repeatedly called on the jury to be more transparent about its criteria, or at least to reveal the reasons behind its decisions to award certain candidates but not others – a process it deemed opaque.<sup>19</sup> It also argued that the jury should consider nominating candidates to the SDA rather than letting designers apply, as this did not reflect the whole scene accurately but instead produced a random selection of winners, depending entirely on who had applied that year.<sup>20</sup> This reflected the magazine’s perception of the awards as a showcase for the Swiss scene as much as a means of supporting specific designers. In 1996, *Hochparterre* questioned whether the awards had lost their relevance, and called for a new beginning. It suggested the reorganisation of the SDA into distinct awards for each existing category.<sup>21</sup> This would permit each award to accept a broader range of practices within a discipline, allowing them to welcome projects straddling design and art, or situated in new fields such as media design.<sup>22</sup>

Just a year later, the exhibition “Made in Switzerland” (1997), celebrating 80 years of design promotion in Switzerland, also provided an opportunity to reflect on the state of the awards.<sup>23</sup> Patrizia Crivelli, the secretary of the SFOC’s design department at that time, credited the exhibition as the starting point of the process of reflection that led to the

16 Lorette Coen: “What Does Swiss Design Need?”, in: Andrea Baur/Mirjam Fischer/Kathrin Stirnemann (eds.): *Swiss Federal Design Grants 2005*, Basel 2005, pp. 54–61; Yann Gerdil-Margueron: “‘L’affiche de l’année’ et son concours réapparaîtront en 2003”, in: *Le Temps* (Geneva), 15 May 2002.

17 [s. n.]: “Keine Grenzen sprengen: Das Stipendium für Angewandte Kunst”, in: *Hochparterre* 5 (1992) 11, p. 54; Köbi Gantenbein: “Das Schaufenster der Soliden und Tüchtigen”, in: *Hochparterre* 7 (1994) 11, pp. 36f.

18 Köbi Gantenbein: “Für die Guten ein Töpfchen”, in: *Hochparterre* 8 (1995) 10, pp. 52f.

19 [s. n.]: “Keine Grenzen sprengen”, p. 54; Gantenbein: “Das Schaufenster der Soliden und Tüchtigen”, pp. 36f.

20 Köbi Gantenbein: “Die Grafik ist in Form”, in: *Hochparterre* 6 (1993) 10, pp. 18f.; Gantenbein: “Das Schaufenster der Soliden und Tüchtigen”, pp. 36f.; Adalbert Locher: “Gestaltungs-Tuttifrutti: Die Preisträger des Eidgenössischen Wettbewerbs für Gestaltung”, in: *Hochparterre* 9 (1996) 10, p. 28.

21 Locher: “Gestaltungs-Tuttifrutti”, p. 28.

22 *Ibid.*

23 Crivelli/Gantenbein/Imboden/Münch: *Made in Switzerland*.

reorganisation of the SDA.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, the criticism in the specialist press had also been taken into account. Köbi Gantenbein and Adalbert Locher, the authors of several of the *Hochparterre* articles mentioned above, were amongst the contributors to the 1997 catalogue, which suggests that they played a part in the overall conversation. According to Crivelli, the 80-year anniversary was a relevant time to rethink design promotion.<sup>25</sup> This started a lengthy process of discussions and analysis on how best to reformat the competition to adapt it to the needs of a new generation of designers.

Through her discussions with actors at different levels of the SDA, Crivelli identified a series of points that needed to be addressed, and started advocating publicly for change in 1999, notably voicing her concerns via the competition's own catalogues. She argued that the monetary prize should remain, but that it needed to be complemented by other forms of support. Recognising that young designers struggled to establish contacts with producers, the economic sector and investors, she advocated for a new role for the SFOC: as an “intermediary between [designers] and industry, museums or any institution ready to realise a project with them”.<sup>26</sup> The specialised press raised more issues that needed to be addressed. The awards seemed to have lost their attractiveness, because many designers did not take part in the competition anymore. As *Hochparterre* had argued before, the discipline-based categories no longer reflected the state of a profession in which the boundaries between disciplines had become increasingly blurred. Ultimately, the awards were not prominent enough in the public sphere.<sup>27</sup>

Crivelli now set about rectifying this situation, drawing in many actors in the process of reorganising the SDA from the design commission to the experts consulted.<sup>28</sup> She also analysed the design scene as part of her Master thesis in the management of non-profit organisations at the University of Fribourg in the early 2000s. Her analysis led to a report which convinced the SFOC that a reorganisation was necessary.<sup>29</sup> While the reorganisation took until 2002 to come into effect, change was already felt as early as 1999, as we shall see below.

## A generational shift

The graphic designer Gilles Gavillet, one of the 1999 SDA awardees, argued that it was “a moment of generational shift” that saw a younger, less experienced cohort of designers awarded instead of an older peer group.<sup>30</sup> In 1999, Gavillet was chosen for the second round of the competition. At this stage, selected designers installed their work in an exhibition that was then reviewed by the jury. While he was setting up his work in Basel, he noticed that some of the other competitors in the category of graphic design were already more established, including people such as André Baldinger or Beat Müller and Wendelin Hess (Müller + Hess), who were between five and ten years older than him. However, in its final selection of awardees, the jury privileged a younger generation. Rather than going to the more established studios, the awards went to less experienced designers. For example,

24 Crivelli: *Eidgenössische Preise für Gestaltung 1999*, n.p.

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*

27 Ralf Michel: “Design fördern ist mehr als Geld verteilen: Eidgenössischer Wettbewerb – Reif für die Veränderung”, in: *Hochparterre* 13 (2000) 8, pp. 26f.

28 Crivelli: “Design Promotion as a Network”, p. 170.

29 Patrizia Crivelli: Interview by the author, Davide Fornari, Robert Lzicar and Sara Zeller, Bern, 12 September 2017.

30 Gilles Gavillet: Interview by the author, Geneva, 31 January 2018.

Gavillet had just graduated from the Ecole Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne (ECAL) in 1998; another winning graphic designer, Martin Woodtli, had also graduated the same year from the Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst in Zurich (HGKZ). Gavillet argues that by awarding less experienced practitioners, the SFOC sent “a generational signal” that illustrated a change in the general direction of cultural politics.<sup>31</sup> The 1999 winners in the category of graphic design were on average under 29, which indeed made them the youngest cohort for several years. In 1997, for instance, the average age of winners was 35 – relatively close to the award’s 40-year age limit for applicants – and their careers would have been accordingly more advanced. This suggests that the SDA had heard the criticism voiced by *Hochparterre* and was ready to give precedence to experimental projects rather than to established designers presenting mid-career projects.

This generational change was also felt in 2000 in the jury of the SDA. The jury is formed yearly by the Federal Commission for Applied Arts, an extra-parliamentary body consisting of five members appointed directly by the Federal Council. The commission selects seven experts from different design fields. In 2000, David Rust was appointed as an external expert for graphic design<sup>32</sup> to advise the Federal Commission for Applied Arts. At 31 years old, he was the youngest expert in graphic design to be appointed since at least 1993.<sup>33</sup> He replaced Ralph Schraivogel, who turned 40 that year and had been an expert for two years. His predecessor had been Werner Jeker, who was 53 when he made way for Schraivogel, and so had represented a quite different generation. The jury had thus begun welcoming younger members, which suggested a change of atmosphere at the SFOC. However, this change was slower to affect other areas, such as the gender balance of the jury, which remained predominantly male until parity was attained in 2002.

The generational shift that took place in 1999 and 2000 can be described as one of the side-effects of the more protracted transformation that was taking place, from economic to cultural promotion. Rather than awarding accomplished practitioners who were able to demonstrate their expertise in a portfolio developed after several years of work, the SFOC was now recognising a younger generation that presented projects that were experimental, self-initiated, or firmly anchored in the cultural sector. The commercial relevance of their practice was not a criterion; instead, their ability to provide a new discourse in the field of design was recognised.

## The 2002 reorganisation

While the aforementioned adjustments were taking place gradually, 2002 was more clearly a year of rapid reorganisation. The relaunch took so much preparation that unlike for the past editions, no catalogue was published for the 2001 SDA. The changes introduced in 2002 were varied, with some more symbolic than others. The name of the competition and that of the SFOC’s design department were changed.<sup>34</sup> The introduction of

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31 *Ibid.*

32 Patrizia Crivelli/Roger Fayet: *Eidgenössische Preise für Gestaltung 2000 = Prix fédéraux des arts appliqués 2000 = Premi federali delle arti applicate 2000*, Bern: Bundesamt für Kultur 2000.

33 At the time of writing, we are still in the process of gaining access to data for earlier periods.

34 In German, for example, the name of competition was changed from “Eidgenössische Preise für Gestaltung” to “Eidgenössischer Wettbewerb”, while the design department was renamed from “Dienst Gestaltung” to “Dienst Design”. The other federal languages also replaced “arts appliqués” and “arti applicate” with “design”.

the English term “design” not only reflected the increasingly common use of the word, but also attempted to give the competition an international touch by using what is unofficially referred to as the “fifth federal language”.<sup>35</sup> New categories were introduced, and a different format was established. It consisted of two broad groups that were of greater overall importance than in the previous classification. Group A comprised unique objects and small series, while group B encompassed serially produced objects. This was deemed necessary to reflect new interdisciplinary practices, and also reflected a decision to require a repositioning on the part of designers in an attempt to encourage a more professional approach in their submissions.<sup>36</sup>

Crivelli decided to introduce a new catalogue system that aimed to address some of the criticism voiced in previous years and to achieve a more significant public impact. The 2002 SDA publication (Figure 1) marked a striking departure from the previous system of relatively disciplined publications between 1994 and 2000 (Figure 2), as it attempted to bring together different areas of activity of the SFOC, along with comment and debate.<sup>37</sup> Designed by the Zurich-based studio Elektrosmog, it is a self-reflexive catalogue that presents the results of the long process of reorganisation. It is a large volume that features extensive reproductions of the applications sent by the winners, from their curricula vitae to the portfolios evaluated by the commission. It also offers various entry points to the chosen topic of the year, “networks”, ranging from traditional articles and interviews to photo essays and diagrammatic drawings depicting social connections on the Swiss design scene.

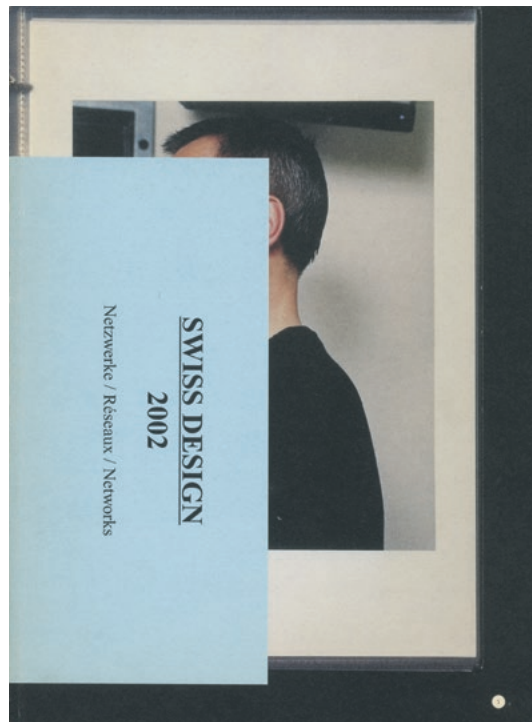


Figure 1: The 2002 catalogue of the Swiss Design Awards designed by Elektrosmog, showing an awardee’s portfolio on the cover.



Figure 2: The 2000 catalogue of the Swiss Design Awards designed by Hanna Koller in the style typical since 1995.

- 35 Adalbert Locher: “Wie der Bund das Design fördern will: Neuerungen beim Förderpreis”, in: *Hochparterre* 15 (2002) 1–2, pp. 18f., here p. 18.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 19; Coen/Crivelli: “A or B – Take Your Pick”, p. 9.
- 37 [s. n.]: “Spielraum des Amtes vermessen: Mit Patrizia Crivelli in Jack’s Brasserie in Bern”, in: *Hochparterre* 14 (2001) 6–7, p. 62.

## The 2002 Swiss Design Award and designers' networks

In 2002, Crivelli argued that the SDA had to play a bigger role in design promotion than merely awarding a money prize. This now included giving out an increasing number of commissions to young designers. Besides the annual SDA publication, they included the catalogue for the Most Beautiful Swiss Books as well as the scenography of the design awards exhibition. Moreover, in a further bid to diversify its role, the SDA introduced the possibility of taking on an internship as an alternative to the prize money. The SFOC played the role of intermediary, putting designers in touch with recognised international studios. This was done with the aim of offering designers a chance to expand their professional network.<sup>38</sup> This decision was a further sign of the SFOC's desire to cater to a less experienced generation, and was welcomed by critics as an attempt to remain close to design practice.<sup>39</sup> More importantly, the provision of internships was also a self-conscious attempt by the SFOC to position itself not only as a grant-giving institution, but also as an actor in the design network – a mediator playing an active role in connecting people and promoting designers.<sup>40</sup>

To investigate the role of the SFOC as an actor in the network in greater detail, we shall below analyse the influence of the SDA on the networks and careers of three winners of the 2002 awards, all of them graphic designers: Gilles Gavillet, Norm and Megi Zumstein. We shall endeavour to explore the relationships that made their work possible, and the role that these relationships went on to play in the designers' own networks.

## Untangling the networks behind the objects

The objects submitted by Gavillet, Norm and Zumstein to the 2002 SDA can serve as our entry points into their networks. While some of their relationships can be identified through a close reading of the material, oral history can be our most valuable tool in discerning the meanings of events and facts.<sup>41</sup> To this end, we conducted semi-structured interviews with designers to retrace the trajectory of objects and to reveal hitherto undiscovered relations. By making visible the many different stages of the three designers' careers and the role played in them by external actors, this approach provides an entry point into a history that goes beyond isolated objects, success stories or heroic figures, instead revealing the complex mechanisms behind the production of design.<sup>42</sup> For instance, analysing these networks highlights the particular role played by the SFOC as award-giver, client, promotion platform, and networking forum. Furthermore, a “move from the macro to the micro”<sup>43</sup> through close readings provides us

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38 Andreas Münch/Urs Staub: “L'Office fédéral de la culture soutient l'art et le design”, in: Anne Weibel (ed.): *OFC Art & Design*, Bern: Bundesamt für Kultur 2007.

39 Locher: “Wie der Bund das Design fördern will”, p. 19.

40 Crivelli: “Design Promotion as a Network”.

41 Alessandro Portelli: “What Makes Oral History Different”, in: Robert Perks/Alistair Thomson (eds.): *The Oral History Reader*, London: Routledge 2006, pp. 32–42.

42 Catherine Moriarty: “Monographs, Archives, and Networks”, in: *Design Issues* 32 (2016) 4, pp. 52–63, here p. 58.

43 Jonathan Glynne/Fiona Hackney/Viv Minton: “Foreword”, in: Jonathan Glynne/Fiona Hackney/Viv Minton (eds.): *Networks of Design: Proceedings of the 2008 Annual International Conference of the Design History Society (UK) University College Falmouth, 3–6 September*, Boca Raton: Universal Publishers 2009, pp. XI–XIV, here p. XIII.



access with an expansive set of relationships, revealing connections between different scenes and their mutual influences, models of practice, and strategies of network-building. This leads to new questions and new points of connection, going beyond the anecdotal by revealing both the smaller and the larger pictures of networks and the influence they have on the production of design.<sup>44</sup>

In 2002, Gilles Gavillet, Norm and Megi Zumstein were at different points in their careers, though they were all still at the start of their professional lives. Norm had launched their studio in 1999 and thus had three years of experience as independent designers. They had already been awarded two SDA in 1999 and 2000. After first working for Cornel Windlin, Gavillet had started working independently in 2001, when he established his studio with David Rust. He was a winner of the 1999 SDA. Finally, Megi Zumstein had just graduated in 2001 and was working for Format53, a small studio in Zurich. The respective status of their careers is reflected in the objects they submitted to the SDA. Analysing these artefacts can be revealing of their designers' early careers and attitudes.

Gavillet's submission comprised publications made while working for Cornel Windlin as well as some of his first commissions as an independent designer. Norm, by contrast, presented their second self-published book. Zumstein had just graduated, and submitted her diploma project. Given that their careers were at slightly different places, winning the 2002 SDA had a different impact on each of them. The objects they presented offer a useful perspective for investigating the designers' developing networks and nodes within these – such as teachers, important clients, and the SFOC itself.

### Gavillet: a series of commissions

Winning the award for the second time in 2002, Gavillet presented a selection of commissioned books and posters developed either independently or in collaboration with David Rust or Cornel Windlin. His selection is a telling snapshot of a pre-existing network nurtured by his place of study: many of the artefacts are a direct result of relationships initiated during his studies at ECAL. Gavillet studied there from 1993 to 1998, witnessing the metamorphosis of the school after Pierre Keller's arrival in 1995, when it ceased being a small institution and became the internationally recognised art school it is today.<sup>45</sup> One of the innovations introduced by the new director was a stark increase in the number of visiting lecturers with a national or international reputation, such as M/M and Cornel Windlin. The latter subsequently invited Gavillet to work for him in Zurich; two of the publications presented by Gavillet for the 2002 SDA were realised there.

Amongst other new visiting lecturers was Lionel Bovier, an art historian with an extensive international network who proved influential for Gavillet. In 1997, Bovier founded the art publishing house JRP Editions with Christophe Chérix. It went on to become the highly respected JRP|Ringier in 2004. Gavillet collaborated with them from early on: of the six publications he submitted for the 2002 SDA, no less than four were connected to Bovier, who was a key node in Gavillet's network. In fact, Gavillet then became JRP|Ringier's artistic director alongside David Rust.

Gavillet chose the monetary prize instead of taking up an internship. The 2002 award

44 Linda Sandino: "Oral Histories and Design: Objects and Subjects", in: *Journal of Design History* 19 (2006) 4, pp. 277–279.

45 Gilles Gavillet: Interview by the author, Geneva, 6 April 2017.

provided him with the means to support launching his own studio with Rust. With regard to his networks, Gavillet had already benefitted from winning the award in 1999, as it had meant he was introduced to the SFOC, for whom he was subsequently invited to pitch for a publication. As for his overall visibility to clients, however, the impact of winning the SDA was limited. According to Gavillet, the public that was aware of the awards remained small and specialised.<sup>46</sup>

### Norm: a self-published project

2002 was Norm's third SDA award. In contrast to Gavillet, the work they presented that year was self-initiated, just like their projects that had won before. In 1999, Krebs and Bruni won as part of *Silex*, a collective that had started in 1995 among students at the Schule für Gestaltung Biel, and which produced an eponymous zine. The publication *Silex* paved the way for a self-initiated approach, and built up the students' network while making their names known on the Swiss scene. Winning the SDA introduced them to the SFOC, which later also commissioned publications from members of the collective. In 2000, Norm submitted another self-initiated project, entitled *Introduction*. It was part manifesto – displaying a radical shift away from the earlier style of *Silex* – and part type-specimen, introducing their first commercially available typeface. Finally, in 2002, Norm presented another self-initiated project entitled *The Things*. It was envisaged as a follow-up to *Introduction* and also used several media, including a publication, electronic sculptures, and posters.

Norm had been working as an independent studio since 1999, and by 2002 they were enjoying an increasing number of commissions. Their choice to present only self-initiated work, unlike Gavillet for instance, sheds light on the importance that their studio placed on such projects. These allowed Norm to develop a highly personal approach – one that they went on to develop further through publications such as *Bruce Lee* (2005). Furthermore, the fact that the SDA supported self-initiated projects as well as commissions shows that the SFOC considered them to be just as vital in furthering the discourse of design. By hiring Norm for the Most Beautiful Swiss Books catalogues of the years 2001 to 2003 (designed from 2002 to 2004), the SFOC encouraged the development of their style and their continued presence on the market of commissioned design.

Apart from such commissions, the most tangible impact of the SDA for Norm was financial. They had hoped to win the grant in order to pay back the debts they owed to their printer. However, Norm also underlined the importance of the SDA and its exhibition as a way of legitimising their practice and meeting people. For instance, their 1999 SDA gave them the credibility to be hired shortly thereafter to teach at ECAL.<sup>47</sup>

### Megi Zumstein: diploma work

Unlike Norm and Gavillet, Megi Zumstein was a first-time winner in 2002, and presented work that she had developed for her 2001 diploma at HGKZ. Her project consisted of a large publication, videos, and interactive elements, all dealing with the theme of language. Instead of choosing the money prize, Zumstein took advantage of the new internship system and went on a work placement at Graphic Thought Facility (GTF) in London. She felt it would offer her an excellent opportunity to gain professional

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46 Gilles Gavillet: Interview by the author, Geneva, 31 January 2018.

47 Norm: Interview by the author, Zurich, 15 June 2017.

experience.<sup>48</sup> There, she worked on small publications, type design, web design, and Adobe Flash animations. It seems like the original goal of the SFOC – to foster the awardee’s networks by offering them the chance to do an internship abroad – was only partially achieved: in fact, in her later career, one can discern no direct traces of the network to which she gained access at GTF, presumably because it was geographically limited to the United Kingdom.

Instead, it could be argued that it was the reputation of the SDA as an institution that helped her expand her network in Switzerland. Upon her return in 2003, Zumstein took up freelancing but did not enjoy it, and so decided to find a part-time job. This proved more difficult than expected, as the effects of the dot-com crash were being felt in the economy. Zumstein, however, credits having won the SDA as a key fact that then worked as a door-opener to agencies. As she jokingly said, it enabled her “to get past the secretary”.<sup>49</sup> She was accordingly hired by the agency Bringolf Irion Vögeli, where she worked for three years. Then, in 2007, she launched an independent studio with her partner Claudio Barandun. The influence of the SDA was twofold for Zumstein. It furthered her professional development by allowing her to take on an internship at a reputable graphic design studio in London, and it also gave her a legitimacy that helped her to find a job upon her return.

## Conclusion

Over the years, the perception of the SDA’s role evolved. The awards were founded a hundred years ago in close collaboration with professional organisations and initially had economic aims. The interests of the involved parties then diverged over time. After its creation in 1975, the SFOC played an increasing role in design promotion by putting an emphasis on cultural promotion rather than on economic growth. This led to a separation between the professional organisations and state-organised promotion. In 2002, the changes undertaken at the SDA reflected another stage in their evolution that was the culmination of a long process of reorganisation spearheaded by Patrizia Crivelli. This served to reinvigorate what had been a declining institution. The modernisation of the prizes helped to legitimise them, and today it is a sought-after, yearly event.

The relaunched awards aimed to make the SFOC a key node in the networks of Swiss designers. While the SFOC did indeed play a vital role in supporting the creation of design, its direct influence on larger networks is less clear. The visibility of the awards seems to have been limited to a specialist audience, for the SDA have played less of a role in helping designers to gain new clients. The benefits have been more indirect, for example through the commissions that the SFOC began awarding. The Federal Office gave a relatively free rein in matters of design, so its role as a “client” helped young designers to gain experience and visibility. Some of these publications went on to win other awards, such as the Most Beautiful Swiss Books.

More generally, while the SDA provided the designers with a form of legitimacy that allowed them to access jobs or to teach, it seems like most of the networks of Swiss designers emerged on the periphery of the SDA. It could thus be argued that the SFOC’s

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48 Megi Zumstein: Interview by the author, Zurich, 6 April 2017.

49 *Ibid.*

impact on designers' networks is secondary, rather than primary: it was winning the SDA that helped them to create their own networks, as opposed to the SDA providing them. While this does not deny the critical role of the SFOC within these networks – whether as an award-giver, a client, promotion platform or networking forum – it confirms that the SDA are just one of many actors exerting an influence on the development of Swiss graphic design. The reorganisation of the prize can therefore be seen as official recognition of the SFOC's existing role as an actor within a network, rather than a complete position change on the part of the awards. Nevertheless, it proved vital to bring new relevance to the awards in the light of the criticism levelled against them. This reorganisation can thus be pinpointed as an important moment in the modernisation process of design promotion in Switzerland – one that ensured the relevance of the SDA and led to the high degree of visibility that these awards enjoy today.