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Type in the eye of the beholder

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RISE

Research Innovation and Internationalisation News

May/June 2011



From the Office of the
Pro-Vice-Chancellor
(Research and Innovation)

Talent by design!

Innovative and creative practices abound here at Salford and never more so recently than in the School of Art & Design.

It's been a winning and rewarding time for Lecturer Mik Pieniazek, Programme Leader in MA Product Design, as his students have recently designed the BBC North Developing Talent Conference Awards and the Salford Business Awards guided and aided by the expertise of Design Artisan Tim Bailey in the Adelphi 3D media resource area

The BBC North awards were held recently at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), and due to unforeseen circumstances UCLan couldn't design and produce in time the award to be handed out at the ceremony. The BBC contacted Salford University and in to the breach stepped our post grad design students! With an extremely tight turnaround the students designed, developed and produced the stunning awards to be handed out at the ceremony. The awards were commented on by Peter Salmon who thought they were 'fantastic'! The designs for the BBC and Business awards were originated by students on the 3D pathway, working with the students Mik and Tim employed e-manufacturing technologies and classic craft techniques in the development and product of the awards.

The awards are made from a new composite material which is 'Recycled from Salford' (trademark protected April 2011), and the Salford Business Awards has a design which features three incised grooves symbolising the EU Triple Helix Strategy for innovation & enterprise. Echoes of Salford's industrial heritage are captured in the cast trapezoid ingot. This is veiled by a laser etched acrylic veneer of refractive blue, which reflects the new future of 'MediaCity'.

If you would like to know more about the innovative practices used in making these awards and the designs behind them contact Mik at: m.p.pieniazek@salford.ac.uk



Type in the eye of the beholder

What do you see when you read a piece of typeface? Just letters or art? To be creative in your practice is to be inventive, imaginative and innovative to constantly be exploring and discussing new ways of seeing or doing the everyday thing, John Rooney, Lecturer in the School of Art and Design and currently studying for a PhD at the University is doing just this. Along with colleagues from the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design and Huddersfield University John has recently set up the Typographic Research Initiative (TRI).

The aim of his research project is to create a set of location specific artefacts that map the creative gesture. John said: "We all engage with typographic issues at some level every day, whether we are aware of it or not. We choose our newspapers for the content, and the way the page looks. Tabloid news sources in print and online use condensed capital letters for headlines, italicised for extra drama. In contrast broadsheet journalism is presented in upper and lowercase, designed to present a more balanced presentation of the news. Email and word processor programmes include a vast range of fonts for us to set our words, however, in reality we stick with a tried and tested set of fonts, usually Times New Roman for the Serif and Arial for SanSerif. We have seen these used before so we know they are suitable".

The research group recently had a presentation and discussion with Bruno Maag from Type design studio Dalton Maag, who was invited to present his views on typeface design (and discussed his displeasure at the use of Helvetica) putting forward his argument that the true modernist typeface was Univers, John commented: "I agreed with Bruno about Univers being a better font to use than Helvetica. However, when one does express an interest in typography in such detail, you do notice variations in individual letterforms at a macro level everywhere, which can get in the way when you just want to read something".

Typographic design can be viral. Type designer Henrik Birkvig recently presented an excellent conference paper in Birmingham on the use of pictograms in typography. This is where an object replaces a letter in a word, and the word is still visible. Birkvig showed several samples

of signage around the centre of Birmingham that use this form. Commenting on Birkvig's thoughts John said: "I was surprised how many there were in the city and of such poor design quality. I felt that the application of this form must be a viral trend. One store makes a sign in this way, it is successful and the shop is busy, therefore the competing businesses see this, and they too develop a similar set of visual coding, not based on aesthetic judgement, just that it looks 'a bit like the sign down the road'".

Typography is not merely the act of designing another set of shapes, and calling this set of forms a typeface. An adaptable typeface is the true application of the written word designed to create a connective tissue between the author and reader at an emotional level. Typographic communication is therefore information aesthetics with emotional content. John, who ran his own Graphic Design consultancy in Manchester, producing international projects for creative sector arts clients including a longstanding commission with Tate Gallery Liverpool before coming to work at Salford, summed up the new research group thus: "The Typographic Research Initiative (TRI) was set up to address the issues discussed above and more too. We want the TRI to be an area where practitioners and researchers can discuss ideas, for both public dissemination and academic appraisal. TRI are running a set of conferences and symposia this year. We also hope to expand into Europe and the US soon with colleagues in design education and practice".

If you would like to know more about this new research group contact John at: j.rooney@salford.ac.uk

University challenge – Science style!

The University, in partnership with the Rotary International Clubs of Salford, successfully piloted a Science & Engineering Challenge competition for Salford Secondary Schools recently.

Based on a very successful outreach model from Australia, this innovative event saw four Schools from the Salford local authority take part in the challenge each bringing a team of 24 year 9 students to the event.

Challenging local high school children again, this March saw the second Salford Science and Engineering Challenge take place, 8 schools were originally booked in but due to some unforeseen circumstances unfortunately only 5 could make the event over the two days. Never the less the atmosphere was electric and enjoyed by all!

The young people were split in to 6 teams that all took part in a challenge for the day including, Crash Landing (egg drop), Disaster Robot, Espionage Mission (balloon car), Renewable Energy (wind power), Solar Car Challenge and Buildings for Earthquakes. Their efforts were scored and then added to an overall school score for the day leaving us with two heat winners and an overall winner for the competition. The heat winners were Salford City Academy and St Ambrose Barlow, with St Ambrose Barlow taking the overall team win.

Helen Brown, The University's College of Science and Technology Recruitment and Retention Officer said: "the ultimate aim of the project is to inspire young people about science and engineering and show them that they can be fun, creative and innovative areas to work in.

The activities this year were all delivered by undergraduate and postgraduate Student Ambassadors from the College of Science and Technology along with volunteers from the Rotary Clubs of Salford. By working with students and members from the local community the pupils are exposed to a generational timeline that can show them the wide variety of routes they can take into science and engineering careers. The feedback from teachers and pupils has been very positive and all of the teachers were keen to take part again next year".

If you would like to know more about this innovative practice contact Helen at: h.brown@salford.ac.uk