



I probably should have known I was going to be a designer a long time ago. When I was a kid, I was consumed with drawing complex imaginary maps (and explaining them to anyone who would listen), designing jerseys for teams in video games (rather than actually playing the games) and reading the encyclopedia and world atlas for fun. The first two quirks are obvious clues that I might someday become a designer, but it's the third that I see as being so integral to why I am a designer. It's a general curiosity about our world and our culture that have drawn me to study and appreciate design as a way of life.

Today, I see myself as a well-rounded student and citizen as well as a designer. I have continued to foster an appreciation for many things beyond my studies, believing that my entire education, from athletics to politics, should be approached with equal seriousness and attention. As a student of graphic design, I understand typographic hierarchy, composition, semiotics, color theory, and system design, but it's the fact that design allows constant, fluid access to many different disciplines that offers me the challenge and constant renewal. As Michael Bierut put it in his *79 Short Essays on Design*, "The great thing about graphic design is it is almost always about something else." It is this "something else" that excites me and it's not simply for my own interest. I approach my work with the attitude that if I cannot care about my client's work, or learn to care about it and relate to them, then how am I to effectively complete the job? If I were unable to see the situation from their perspective (or multiple perspectives) and invest myself as a partner in the project then I would simply not be able to create a meaningful or worthy piece.

And I'm not just talking about research, collaboration, and understanding here. These are key components in the success of the job, but when curiosity is woven into a project, graphic design has the opportunity to transcend merely "work for hire" and become a more personal, more artful practice. Curiosity is the symbiotic human agent that enables the graphic designer to personally communicate, resonate, and connect with the client, and achieve graphic design's ultimate purpose and goal: to connect and communicate information and meaning visually to its recipient.

Case in point: this past summer, while interning at the adidas Group, I was asked to research the "brand story" of various client teams. One of my favorite client experiences was with the NHL Florida Panthers. I am a big sports fan, but hockey is the one sport I will almost never watch—in fact, I kind of hate it. Instead of begrudgingly researching an ice hockey team paradoxically from South Florida, where many local residents have never even seen snow, much less played hockey, I became obsessed with all aspects of the client, their story, the history of the region, and even the scientific taxonomy of the Florida Panther itself. I approached the project from the perspective of the fan/consumer, the rival, the citizen, and the owner. My resulting designs were built upon a sturdy foundation of honest curiosity. They echoed an Art Deco style with typography reminiscent of vintage South Florida hotel signage combined with an acute attention to the bone structure of a panther's jaw line. In the end, the designs mattered very little. It was instead the process that will live on in me affording me the ability to create more meaningful and powerful work.



M.C. Escher's famous rendering of the two hands drawing one another simultaneously illustrates this phenomenon. If design is created in a vacuum without any meaningful exposure to real human relationships and a legitimate interest and concern from the designer, it may be beautiful but it will ultimately be design generated not by cultural or social context but by the mere institution of graphic design itself. The best design that I see is inspired by a child-like curiosity that takes everything into account: a ballet identity inspired by rows of skyscrapers, an identity system for a high-end store echoing the bustle of big city traffic, or a sweetener packaging that divorces itself from market traditions and instead focuses on the simple qualities of the product. It is successes like these that push me to pursue my diverse and varied passions - in addition to design. Ultimately, it all comes back to the curiosity I still hold onto from my childhood, when I envisioned entire civilizations on a piece of white copier paper.