

# Liemburg and Nijessen: A joint expedition



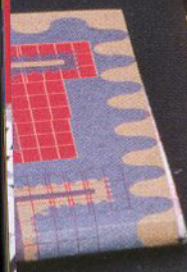
The graphic designers  
may have officially  
ended their  
collaboration, but they  
still share an  
adventurous,  
exploratory attitude.

~  
by Nadette de Visser

page 90

‘There’s nothing wrong  
with being a little wild.  
A hint of fanaticism  
can be fascinating in  
design.’





structure, a world. In the booklet, her work seems to say, "I am on a voyage of discovery, a traveller through countries and worlds and the elements. I combine what I find in an attempt to create a new culture."

Says Liemburg, "Our role felt like stepping into a report of an expedition. In preparation, we turned her studio upside down and made lists of all the things we found there. It was like being on an archeological expedition in Egypt, numbering the items we recovered. Later, we mapped out her treasure dome, organized by different categories: rituals, exhibitions, travels, fantasy, characters, games, places, and the undiscovered country." The map is shaped like a T, in reference to her name; the designers call her 'The Total-T-Transformer'. Tee made line drawings of objects she'd used in her installations, and those were used on the map.

After working together intensively for three years on numerous projects, Golden Masters reached the end of the creative line. As exhilarating as the partners had found the collaboration, it had also been draining. "Gradually our styles began to diverge," Liemburg says. Adds Niessen: "I was focusing on type, more toward 'supporting' graphic design." Liemburg says, "We both have a tendency to tell our own specific stories. But neither of us is a problem-solving designer. We both felt a need for our own platform." A new chapter had begun; the two designers had to find their own paths again.

Liemburg finds inspiration everywhere, even in fruit wrappers at the supermarket. He seeks to loosen the traditional boundaries and structure of graphic design. He's currently working on an assignment for the Rijksgebouwendienst (Government Buildings Agency). He is also preparing to take up a teaching position in Boston, and recently designed posters announcing his arrival. And on occasion, he writes for the Dutch design magazine *Items*. "My frame of reference will always be graphic design," he says. "I look back into its history and at my predecessors. It is the core and the point of departure for my work. I like to stretch the methods and approach of graphic design, but it will always remain my vantage point."

As for Niessen, he now teaches at the Rietveld Academy, sharing his understanding of the craft with a new generation of designers. He shows them to use every tool available, even the unlikeliest ones, to build a visual language





>

In the visual language that is graphic design, Harmen Liemburg and Richard Niessen have developed their own vocabulary. The Amsterdam-based duo, previously known as Golden Masters, meander through styles, colours, textures and shapes, creating design that borders upon and sometimes crosses over to art. It is a playful world this illustrious pair live in – one that curls and winds and is full of windows to other places.

It wasn't long after they graduated from Amsterdam's Rietveld Academy that the two young designers met and joined forces. "I knew and liked Richard's work," Liemburg says. "He's someone who experiments and improvises with very humble tools. He has an exploring mind, and, like me, he loved print and its process." Niessen says, "I remember Harmen's graduation project. It was posters in three print editions with mixed colours. At that time, the end of the '90s, everyone was printing in either full colour or monochrome, and everything was designed on computer. Superimposing coloured layers and letting them create new colour schemes was an adventurous thing."

Shortly after they met, they began sharing a studio and brainstorming together, and became Golden Masters. The three years that followed were hectic, immensely inspiring, and successful.

**A T-shaped map** ~ Not long after Liemburg and Niessen became a team, Jennifer Tee approached them with a special assignment. Liemburg recalls, "We had our own projects going. One of the main things was organising the Jack events. Jack was a multidisciplinary event, a stage where different disciplines could meet and cross. Writers, musicians, graphic designers, artists, industrial designers and architects all came together and cross-fertilised." Tee's project was right up their alley: she'd been looking for graphic designers to work with her and create an integral part of her installations.

"It was a real challenge for us," says Niessen. "Our work had to be part of the overall exhibit, a work within her work." It is a small package that folds out into a huge map that depicts Jennifer Tee's universe. In an unorthodox way, this booklet catalogues Tee's work and vision. Its multicoloured layers describe the exhibit piece by piece, and connect them together to form a coherent

>





and structure. "Compared to what was going on in the world of graphic design in the '80s, I think this is a time to be a bit more exuberant," he says. "One of the things I sometimes miss in my students at the Rietveld is the courage to experiment." Liemburg agrees, saying, "Graphic work by young designers often has an aspect of pretentiousness: it is work that wants to be taken seriously. They forget the tools of the trade. There's nothing wrong with being a little wild. A hint of fanaticism can be quite fascinating in design."

Even if they've returned to their respective studios, their common interests and friendship have kept them together. Liemburg says, smiling, "We are good friends, so we still see each other on a regular basis – and then, invariably, we discuss work a lot."

- Ω -

[www.harmenliemburg.nl](http://www.harmenliemburg.nl)  
[www.tm-online.nl](http://www.tm-online.nl)

'Compared to what was going on in the world of graphic design in the '80s, I think this is a time to be a bit more exuberant.'