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Paper tiger

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LEFT THE NEW "BRODY CALVERT" FONT CREATED BY BRODY AND DESIGN LEGEND MARGARET CALVERT THAT WILL FORM PART OF A NEW VISUAL LANGUAGE FOR THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART. BELOW NEVILLE BRODY IN HIS OFFICE AT RESEARCH STUDIOS

IT WAS MIDDAY ON A SATURDAY MORNING and Neville Brody had just felt the earth move.

"I can feel the table shaking," he says, gripping his cup of Pacific Coffee flat white more closely. "Is that an earthquake?"

As we were seated on Design Boulevard, in the shadow of the HKDI's main building, it was more likely that Brody was feeling a subway train passing through Tiu Keng Leng MTR station, but the tremors could have had their source in his ideas, for they were earth shattering enough. Here's a selection – paper is more interesting for designers than the digital space, teenagers are getting bored of the Internet, award winners should be obliged to do community service to pass on their excellence to others and his work means more to him when people hate it.

It's no surprise that Brody has a radical take on most issues. His career has always been about breaking through boundaries, ever since he first started to draw, which he claims happened before he could walk, about 15 years before he first heard about punk rock and the Sex Pistols.

"I was disgusted by the idea of the Sex Pistols at first," he says. "But then Punk music caught my attention because it was about anything being possible and that gelled with my interest in Dada-ism, Constructivism and William Burroughs. At college I was exploring ideas outside the box and a lot of it was about breaking the rules and punk was about breaking the rules."

As he talks it's very apparent that Brody is no ordinary executive figure within the design community. He may have risen to be Dean of the School of Communications at the Royal College of Art and President of D&AD (Design and Art Direction) in its fifty-first year but his passion is still a vibrant force, always present in the commitment that's a defining characteristic of the way he speaks.

"If you are not obsessed with what you are doing you shouldn't be doing it," he says "You must be constantly driving to make yourself and what you do the best it can possible be, always understanding that you will never get there, you just have to keep pushing forward. If you are going to go into the creative industries it's an unforgiving space. The best you can achieve is to do something that inspires somebody. You can never sit down and think, right I did it."

Brody's dedication to his craft has given him a clear perspective on the industry to which given his professional three decades that as creative director *Arena* magazines, the covers for Depeche Voltaire and one behind FUSE, an in 1991 that is a bible typographers.

"I think the role of design and the responsibility of the designer is to take the hidden or invisible spaces and make them tangible and clear," he says "The role of design is to reveal not to conceal, the role of advertising is often to conceal but design was born in public service and it play in serving a public in the way that it reveals ideas and hidden messages."

This approach has not always made Brody popular –

he was almost expelled from college for designing a stamp with the Queen's head turned sideways – but his philosophy begins from the idea that popularity can often be the enemy of creativity.

"I always thought my work was most successful when people hated it because that mean that people were bringing their own reaction to my reactive space," he says. "I always thought that people shouldn't particularly like what I do, but should be forced to question it, as soon a people starting liking what I did too much I thought it had become ineffective."

And yet many people have admired Brody's work, bringing him

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In September the HKDI Gallery played host to an exhibition of prize-winners from this year's D&AD Awards. The event brought Neville Brody to Hong Kong, where he told *Daniel Jeffreys* about his radical new perspectives on digital design, education and the future of D&AD, where he has just assumed the role of president.

RESEARCH STUDIOS



LEFT A TYPOGRAPHIC SAMPLE FROM FUSE MAGAZINE; BELOW NEVILLE BRODY

a powerful reputation and the opportunity to guide D&AD at a critical juncture in its history, as it embarks upon its second half century. Set up in 1962 to promote excellence in design and advertising, its iconic Yellow and Black Pencils are awarded to work that is groundbreaking in its field. The Awards are widely considered the Oscars of the global creative industries.

D&AD Pencils are presented to both students and professional creatives and the exhibition at HKDI featured one hundred selected pieces from both the student and professional Awards. Pencils are only awarded to work that is strong enough, so no fixed quantity of Awards is given in a particular year, with work being judged by top creative minds from around the world. Most designers would probably give their eye-teeth to be part of D&AD, but when Brody was asked to join its executive committee he responded with some conditions.

"I had never been a member of D&AD when they asked me," says Brody. "I said I would join the committee on the condition that D&AD do more to funnel its resources toward education."

The result was two years as chairman of the education subcommittee and the chance as President to implement his proposals for D&AD's future.

"I have two ideas, first that there must be a circle of learning and when you award excellence, excellence must nurture excellence. This is the idea that every pencil carries a responsibility. We want to introduce a kind of community service. Pencil winners, yellow or black would give back to the industry by mentoring emerging creative talents."

I joked that if somebody wins both a yellow and a black pencil they should spend a term as a "mentor-in-residence" at HKDI. Brody immediately endorsed the idea, because his other plan for D&AD involves doing something that HKDI is very familiar with. With design in the UK not getting the kind of governmental support that has been so vital to HKDI's attempts to embrace the whole community, Brody has had to find other means to encourage future designers whose families have few resources to fund further education.

"We have persuaded D&AD to launch a foundation," he says. "The Foundation is going to raise money to support students who want to be creatives but don't come from a moneyed background."

Brody would not be Brody if he only had two ideas for his time as D&AD. He also has plans to change the organisation's direction.

«I always thought my work was most successful when people hated it, because that meant they were bringing their own reaction to my reactive space.»

"D&AD has been a place to celebrate excellence before. Now I think it changes, and becomes more political. It should lobby government. It should defend and push for the rights of the creative industry, it should support creative education regardless of the government and it should stand up for the rights of the

creative space. If you want the history of great graphic design and advertising for the last 50 years, D&AD is the place to look. It's been the highest regarded of all awards. It's done a stunning job. Now it shifts, it has to become more socially responsible, community based and more international."

Which brings us back to paper, the digital world, and Brody's startling observation that his son Francis, who is 15, would never see the Internet as a place to look for creative inspiration.

"Twenty years ago the digital space was a land of possibilities," he says. "There was no precedent, so you could do what you wanted. It could be a space of creativity. But for my son it is a utility and not a space for experimentation and people are going, 'Oh my god, this is so boring.' Adrian Shaughnessy has pointed out quite correctly that the younger generation see the Internet the same way we saw phones in the 1970s. It is so utilitarian. So students are not that interested. They rather go to print. So paper might have become less and less important as a space for carrying information, but more important for being a creative and exploratory space.

Digital technology has liberated paper to become a much more radical space, as the digital space has become more homogeneous, so paper becomes more radical."

Brody has found that a growing number of his students would rather create a book made of paper that has only one edition than a digital app that might be seen by millions. He would prefer they do both, but understands the process at work.

"The one thing that's constant in design is change," he says. "My legacy is not my work, unless people can find in it some new questions. The main legacy I would like to leave is to enable creative spaces for other people."

And with that, the table began to shake again. ∞