

WIM CROUWEL & TYPO- GRAPHY



The film [HELVETICA](#) introduced me to Wim Crowel and it was a rare chance to see different generations of typographers, designers and how they react when they hear the word “helvetica” was quite funny in an inspiring way. WIM CROUWEL is the big legendary Dutch graphic designer and typographer known for his systematic and creative approach to the shape of letters. Van Abbe museum organised a special exhibition in their library occasionally for his 80th birthday.

Crouwel studied at the Minerva Academy in Groningen then went to Amsterdam, where he became a student under [Charles Jongejans](#) at the Instituut voor Kunstnijverheids-onderwijs. His first job was with a company that designed and built exhibitions. He started his own firm in 1954. In 1956, he started working with interior architect [Kho Liang Le](#), carrying out assignments for the furniture industry and the graphics sector.

[Edy de Wilde](#) (the director of Van Abbe museum that time) became one of Crouwel’s regular patrons, asking him to design the museum’s posters, catalogues and letterhead. This partnership continued after De Wilde transferred to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1963, and Crouwel was also commissioned to make the designs for the Stedelijk Museum and Museum Fodor. The virtual carte blanche he was given allowed him to complete his first high-

profile experiments with letter shapes. Examples are the catalogues and posters for the Léger (1957), Hiroshima (1957), Bazaine (1958), Lurçat (1959), Fernhout (1963), Michaux (1964), Vormgevers (1968), Oldenburg (1970) and Lucht kunst (1971) exhibitions.

In response to the technical limitations of the first computer-controlled typesetters from 1963, Crouwel designed his ‘New Alphabet’, a font with only horizontal and vertical lines. Crouwel did not design his alphabet for book typography specifically, but believed that people could get used to “new shapes of new alphabets and new forms of typography. New Alphabet is a highly abstract font, based on a dot-matrix system in which he intended it to be easily read by computers. Crouwel has designed several font sets, of which the New Alphabet (1967) is best known. New Alphabet 1, 2 and 3, Stedelijk Alphabet, Fodor Alphabet, Gridnik Alphabet.

“Design is about problem solving, but I cannot resist adding something personal. A page should have tension” said Wim Crouwel.

To go further with my research I decided to meet [Marlene Soulier](#), a young graphic designer working in a studio in Amsterdam, who uses typography in her work. She explained me that for her, type was just a tool to express a message in a certain way. That using different typefaces will attach different meanings to a message. She showed

me some of her projects that play with message and typography. In the dream project she organized her typography according to the emotions of her dreams. The result is very chaotic but sensible at the same time, as she used an elegant [serif typeface](#).

The most interesting thing to discover in this research was, how powerful typography actually is, when we want to communicate certain messages. And how typefaces, just by themselves can already have a meaning, without even looking at the actual message.

