



Early examples of The Book: D&AD Annuals from the beginning, 1963 (far left), 1968, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1978.

Brandwatch

'Rewind' rewind

Until 2 February 2003, the V&A is home to an exhibition called 'Rewind'. This covers 40 years of D&AD and claims to show 'the most famous examples of design and advertising celebrating the D&AD Awards 1963-2002'. Our resident commentator on brands and branding, Locum non-executive director **Tony Hodges**, questions if this is an overclaim. And, more important for our readers, is this exhibition a fair reflection of branding in the destination industry?

Toys for the boys?

O the curse of Brandwatch. No sooner does this journal praise Disney's marketing yet question its behemoth status than the bottom falls out of Mickey Mouse's world (or at least its share price). Then, just as the last issue is rolling off the presses and pointing criticism at VisitScotland's advertising, the advertising agency responsible - if that is not too strong a word - is put on notice.

And there we are asking the V&A what it is doing with its communications, and along come three exhibitions, rather like London buses, that simply command publicity. You may not have enjoyed British Galleries or Versace but you could not ignore them. And if you have any interest in the craft skills of branding, you ought not ignore 'Rewind'.

The last time that the V&A tilted at the windmill of branding, it addressed the brands themselves in 'Brand-New', with acute topicality to boot (and boot is exactly what many brand owners wanted to do to Ms Naomi Klein around that time). In 'Rewind', we can look at branding from the other end of the telescope: not at the power of brands but at the craft of branding. Yes, dammit, the V&A has taken a topical trick again. For 'Rewind' celebrates not just craft skills but the most coveted awards for those craft skills: the D&AD awards. And in case you had been asleep recently, allow me to remind you that everywhere we look at the moment someone is handing out awards. Reality TV is awarding C-cup and D-list celebrities over here and poppies and popstars over there: career highs and career lows, treat them as impostors all the same. The cultural heritage and advertising businesses share little but both have chosen 2002 to initiate 'Best of...!' award schemes to place the winners of different awards side by side 'in the interests of best practice': Best in Heritage over there (reviewed on pages 80 to 88) and 'Best of the Best' - in advertising - over here. Maybe it is the need to follow up the millennium effect and improve on all those 'best of the last thousand years' shows. If, indeed, 'Great Britons' is an improvement....

D&AD awards are different, however. Like a strong consumer brand, D&AD has proved itself over time. Through crisis and criticism and crass management, these awards have held on to their position as the Oscars of design and advertising. Not in their vulgarity, you understand - Cannes and *Campaign* and Clio are out in front on that score - but in their *desirability*. Unless you have worked in design or



At *Rewind*, you will bump into a few old friends ... like Saatchi's 'Pregnant Man'

advertising, you might find it difficult to understand how important it is to feature in the D&AD Annual ('The Book' as it is biblically described). To win one of its coveted yellow pencils is to add big numbers to the salary package, apart from the ego reward.

Why is D&AD so important? Partly because it is almost religious in its defence of craft skills and because neither branding nor marketing communications can function without those craft skills. Partly because the British have proved rather good at these two field sports. In the same way that the '60s saw British musicians absorb the work of their American predecessors and soon outstrip them, so it was with design and advertising. (For Muddy Waters and Keith Richards read Rosser Reeves and David Abbott or Mary Lawrence and Mary Lewis.)

Partly it is because this is where the craftsmen run the show. It is their ballgame. This is the asylum where the inmates are in charge. It is said that Napoleon once averred: 'Men are governed by toys.' Ignore, if you will, the fact that D&AD could often have used some of Bonaparte's skills in governance; instead consider how D&AD puts that principle into action. 'Toys for the boys' is, in fact, one of the recurrent criticisms of D&AD, since the same names come round every year and the same agencies are ignored every year, or so it seems. In truth, this is probably more to do with a limited pool of

talent and a limited number of agencies committed to the highest standards, but who knows? The other ancient chestnut is that winning awards has little connection with marketing effectiveness or building brands, and it is true that there is no direct, logical, umbilical link between craft skills and commercial success. And yet, it is surprising how often successful products and celebrated brands can boast award-winning looks, or how much common ground there is between annuals of design or advertising effectiveness and the contents of D&AD annuals.

Let those debates run along elsewhere. (They will.) Let us consider how well 'Rewind' struts its stuff and, in particular, how well this exhibition adorns the other industry it serves: the destination industry.

Worth leaving home for?

This is one of those exhibitions where you need the book, indeed where the book is better than the film. How could it be otherwise when the central exhibit is itself called *The Book*? In fact, if you are not going to find it easy to visit South Kensington before 2 February,



Rewind's first proper nod to destinations. Dutch designer Gert Dumbar at the Rijksmuseum

you should seriously consider ordering this book (*Rewind: Forty Years of Design & Advertising*; Phaidon Press; £45; www.phaidon.com; take a bow Jeremy Myerson and Graham Vickers).

If you do make it to the V&A, you will bump into a few old friends. There's Charles Saatchi's early 'Pregnant Man' and those long-lost, much-loved Martians from the land of Cadbury Smash. There's *Nova* magazine, as once it was, and Benson & Hedges' pyramids. But there are gaps and flaws as well as old friends. When you think how much happened towards the end of the '60s, there is precious little to suggest a creative revolution was under way. There is precious little on display, period.

However, the more important gaps are reflections of the industries and crafts which D&AD has served (or governed, if that is what you choose to believe). 'Rewind' reflects what is a very British institution. Rarely do any of those foreign chaps get a look in. The great exception is a Dutch graphic designer called Gert Dumbar, whom we had the great good fortune to co-opt - via the Royal College of Art and then D&AD (as a student) in the '60s. Dumbar stamped his presence on the '80s and '90s with work for, primarily, public bodies such as Westeinde Hospital and the Dutch post office, PTT. And in 1985 for the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

At last. A destination wins an award. And if that is not the first, I am a Dutchman too.

Strictly speaking, other destination types had won D&AD and 'Rewind' recognition before Dumbar came along, but they were retail destinations that we had to use, like it or not: grocers, banks, post offices. With the possible exceptions of department stores like Harvey Nichols or Harrods, there is no 'Rewind' recognition for places you actively choose to visit, for pleasure, until the '80s. The book shows us a classic copy-led tube poster for the National Maritime Museum; 1985, Saatchi & Saatchi in halcyon days of 'nothing is impossible' and still the odd winner. But the 'Rewind' exhibition designer is keen to underline his thesis that the destination business did not really cause D&AD jurors much debate until the '90s and the last five years in particular.

Perhaps this is because marketing and destinations have been infrequent bedfellows over the years, at least until the late '90s. Perhaps D&AD jurors had not noticed high enough standards. Certainly tourism and visitor attraction advertising had a patchy history and D&AD was notoriously biased to advertising interests for a number of years. Perhaps there is a genuine market phenomenon at work here and all that D&AD and 'Rewind' are reflecting is an industry coming late to the party.

The destination identity of the '90s, complete with the opera singer's orifice



D&AD discovers the South Bank, 1994



The Design & Art Directors Association opened the door to the destination industry, formally, when it created a section for Retail and Environmental Design, first noted by 'Rewind' in 1989. But the first major impact that the exhibition celebrates for our market place was for a masterpiece of 'corporate identity': English National Opera, 1992. (Its O is, of course, for the opera singer's open mouth, not just for Opera.) Design director Mike Dempsey and his team at Carroll Dempsey & Thirkell had created a new, ownable language that was one of the design triumphs of the decade.

Thereafter, 'Rewind' starts to recognise the destination industry for its core contributions: to environmental design.

Gold for London Eye: '... almost a metaphor for creativity at D&AD'



The designer's destinations?

Early winners for Environmental Design in the book according to 'Rewind' are precisely those institutions you would expect to show the way for the destination industry. In 1994, the Stanton Williams Design Group won a D&AD silver award for exhibition work at the South Bank Centre. (In a rare, early example of the word spreading along the river, this group's minimalist approach at SBC led to a commission at the National Theatre.)

In 1996, NMSI started an award-winning tradition with Ben Kelly's masterplanning and detailed design for The Basement. The design commentator's attitudes to destinations show through in his surprise at their success in 'transforming a dusty national institution, attended under duress on wet weekends, into a vibrant visitor attraction'. Apparently the design work 'turned a dull, difficult space into a tactile and technicolour environment which could 'switch children onto science'. Well I never. What took you exhibition designers so long to get noticed by these sophisticates?

The design commentators of 'Rewind' hit their straps as the millennium dawns. The funds roll into destinations, as do the punters, and D&AD sits up and takes notice. The usual suspects are featured, as indeed they should be. The London Eye won D&AD's highest accolade, its Gold Award, for Environmental Design & Architecture. The D&AD Annual congratulated Marks Barfield with this description from its chairman: '...almost a metaphor for creativity at D&AD - an idea which is entrepreneurial and fraught with risk, which is nearly consumed by doubt and cynicism, but which wins through spectacularly in the end'. Hear, hear. (And how good it is to see D&AD recognising commercial imperatives.)



D&AD meets the millenium and - at last - the destination industry, at London Eye and National Botanic Garden of Wales (left)

Also in 2001, Sir Norman Foster's Great Glass House in the National Botanic Garden of Wales was rightly honoured, as were Carson Mann and interactive specialist Itch for their work in the Science Museum's Wellcome Wing. The Magna Project went on to win a silver in 2002 for architects Wilkinson Eyre and glowing copy for lighting designer Jonathan Spiers. The new millennium was marked, perhaps most wryly by the first appearance in D&AD for Frenchman Philippe Starck, working with architects Harper Mackay on Ian Schrager Hotels.

At last, for D&AD, environmental design had arrived. The advertising men and pack designers had finally opened their eyes to the world outside, to everyone's benefit.

An alternative view

Broad brushstrokes first. Brandwatch wishes that 'Rewind' had told more *stories*, particularly about the *people* who shaped design and advertising in the last decades of the millennium. The exhibition fairly reflects the narrow, if gradually expanding, viewpoint of D&AD juries, but that does mean - for instance - totally inadequate emphasis on *product design*, and indeed the godfather of British product design, Kenneth Grange of Pentagram. The organisation's generic design bias shines through in the difficulty with which it treats great *copy* and great *copywriters*. Although Abbott Mead Vickers (now AMVBBDO etc.) gains its share of space, given its awards history, you sense that the designers, curators and editors, fail to grasp the true significance of David Abbott, a man who, more than any other, combined English wit and elegance with Bernbach's American lessons on what makes effective advertising. If anyone made a difference to our advertising in the last 40 years, he did.

To be more specific, did 'Rewind' miss out on any great advertising or design work for the destination industry, recognised by D&AD but not by this exhibition? To indulge our own interests for a moment, yes. Consider the brilliant English Heritage press advertising of 1997 and 1998, especially their brave self-deprecation, under David Abbott's twinkling eye. Look out the silver award-winning packaging for the National Portrait Gallery, also in 1998. And if you can lay a hand on the D&AD Annual for 2000, you will see no less than six separate appearances by a design consultancy of greater importance than 'Rewind' seems to appreciate. (Four of these appearances, no less, for destinations.) Focus on just one example here: the

Self-deprecation as an art form, under the aegis of David Abbott



Destination retailing, with style, from Four IV Design Consultants



Another award-winning destination design from Lewis Moberly

outstanding identity work for the National Maritime Museum, Cornwall. It moves, it delights, it communicates. And, rare for D&AD, this consultancy is led by a woman.

Let us admit that we all have our favourites. No doubt 'Rewind' designer Michael Johnson has his. Yet, objectively (if that is possible), Brandwatch would have liked to see the difficult issue of gender bias - a constant limitation of advertising and design businesses, at the very top - tackled, and tackled honestly. There is only one woman who has been President of D&AD in its first 40 years. 'Rewind' notes her emergence on the scene (with brilliant own brand packaging for Asda) and records the effectiveness of her work for Boots. It faithfully quotes David Stuart of the Partners on her: 'a designer out of the top drawer - or maybe a secret compartment above it'. It notes her reputation as 'an arch-stylist with great ideas'. Yet it fails to grasp her importance as an inspiration, to designers and to women across the industry. The latest *Design Week* 'Creative Survey' of award-winning design consultancies places her firm, Lewis Moberly, in the top four across all categories in which it could be placed over the past three years, top in its core discipline, and also - simultaneously, remarkably - top for design effectiveness awards.

We see her work every day in the destination industry, partly

because we owe her some thanks for the Locum identity. 'Rewind' may not quite recognise her influence but we raise a glass to her. Mary Lewis, you are beyond peer, beyond gender, simply the best. Yours is the Brandwatch Award.

The Brandwatch Award will not, however, be going to the V&A. The British Galleries were publicised brilliantly and will doubtless win awards for content, but the exhibition itself is a communications nightmare. And 'Rewind' deserves a better space. How sad, let alone ironic, that its environmental design exhibit suffers the audio-pollution of radio commercials. And that its brilliant but criminally projected television reel is also at odds with the nearby radio soundtrack. In one confined space, some of the best work from Britain's twentieth-century craftsmen is brutalised by curators from another era. The 'Rewind' exhibition is a classic example of marketing professionals failing to market their own wares. And of a great destination limping, noisily, into the future.