CULTURE — CANADA'S CULTURAL GATEWAY

GO

my perspective

David Berman
Ottawa, ON

Drawing the line

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When David Berman, President of David Berman Communications, and National Ethics Chair of the Society of Graphic Designers of Canada, first began speaking at conferences about ethics in design and the important role that visual communicators play, he used to get a lot of business arguments. "Now the concept of socially-responsible design has really taken off, people are interested and embracing the idea more and more—not only in Canada, but in many parts of the globe."

David says, "Canada has a leadership role in the world in recognizing the impact that design has on culture. One example of this is the way the Canadian government has been a leader in prominently displaying images and warning messages on cigarette packaging, recognizing the power of graphics to the betterment of everyone. Our laws around cigarette advertising and the packaging itself—that's an example of leadership, and something that's being adopted in different parts of the world."

"The code of ethics established in Canada for graphic designers, and its commitment to society and the environment, has become a template for the International Council of Graphic Design Associations (ICOGRADA) for professionals in other countries seeking to establish a similar approach. There are many positive things that we're doing here in Canada which are being exported to an increasingly globalized world."

"The output of design professionals is mass communication. Technology has made it cheaper than ever to reach larger and larger populations with powerful messages—visual messages that can link consumption to fulfilling perceived needs. If you go out and just invent whatever image will sell the most products, without any mind to ethics, you risk losing the culture."

"I'm saying it's important for design professionals to consider what happens to a culture, whether it be your own, or another culture. When you hit them hard with brand advertising linked to deep emotional needs—it can be overwhelming. If professionals in a society reflect their principles and ethics in their work, it can help cultures shift into the globalized economy—allowing the core values and identity of the culture to survive the changes without losing itself. It's a point about culture and it's a point about professionalism and ethics. And it goes beyond design. You could argue that all professionals could also apply the same thinking."

Although David Berman is actively involved with his own communications company in Ottawa, he is regularly invited to speak about ethics and social responsibility in design at conferences and events organized by universities and graphic design associations around the world. People have listened to his messages not only in North America, but also in Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and the United Kingdom.

Interview conducted March 2004.

To find out more, visit:
Society of Graphic Designers of Canada - Design Cares
http://www.designcares.ca

Société des designers graphiques du Québec
http://www.sdgq.qc.ca/?menuselect=organismes
(French only)

Applied Arts Magazine
http://www.appliedartsmag.com

Magazine *Grafika*
http://www.okgrafika.com/english/about.asp

Society of Graphic Designers of Canada
http://www.gdc.net/

David Berman Communications
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