

CIPE PINELES, 1909 - 1991

The announcement for "An Evening with One of the Best," a lecture series sponsored by the Art Directors Club of New York in the mid-eighties, promised to be an illuminating discussion with some of New York's leading designers. Featured were six veteran advertising art directors and graphic designers who were (and are) indisputably among the very best. The title was not false advertising but the series was more than a little tainted. For the participants in this ego fest were all men, without so much as a token woman in the bunch.

One exemplar who should have been invited to participate was Cipe Pineles. As art director of *Glamour*, *Overseas Woman*, *Seventeen* and *Charm*, and as publications designer for the Parsons School of Design, the Vienna-born Pineles certainly had the credentials. She was as much, if not more, of an influence on publication design and illustration in America as any

other member of the Art Directors Club. Moreover, for many young women entering this field she was an important model.

In fact, in 1948 Cipe Pineles became the first woman member of the New York Art Directors Club (founded in 1921) and was eventually the first of only two women inducted, so far, into the Art Directors' Hall of Fame. Although Pineles would have vehemently denied that this was an accomplishment on which to hang a legacy, it was clearly a major inroad at a time when men—young and old—jealously guarded the gates to their exclusive sanctorum.

As a young Pratt graduate in the early 1930s, Pineles had found work with *Contempora*, an affiliation of several internationally known designers, artists and architects, where she designed modish fabrics and displays until being hired away by Condé Nast in 1933 to become an assistant to Dr. M.F. Agha, then art director of *Vanity Fair*



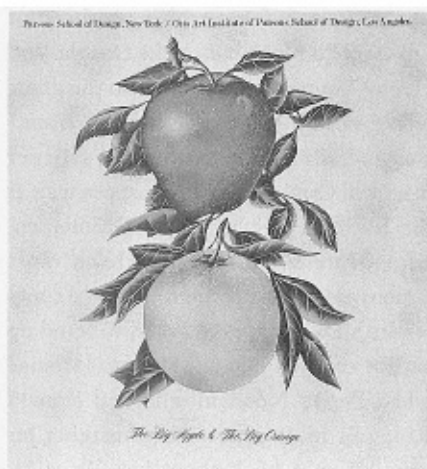
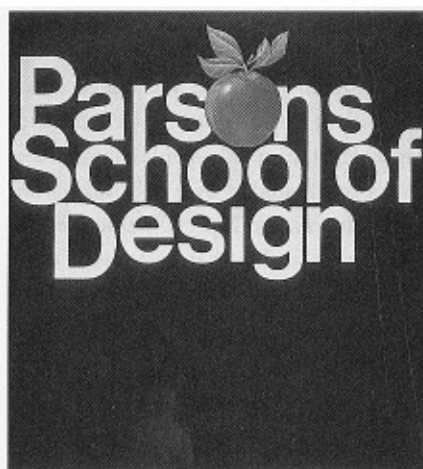
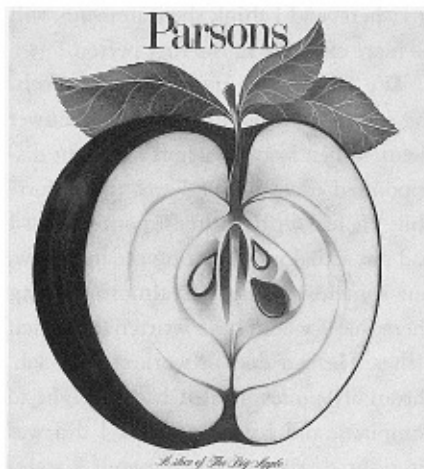
With no budget for art, Pineles created striking covers for the Lincoln Center Journal using their own publicity shots.

and *Vogue*. Pineles, who knew little about publication design when she joined Agha, received an invaluable education from this brilliant taskmaster. Five years later she was made art director of *Vogue's* poor relation, *Glamour*, a magazine that Condé Nast cynically used to target women who couldn't afford the high cost of dressing up. Pineles became so indignant about Nast's demeaning attitude towards *Glamour* that in 1944 she gladly left to become art director of *Overseas Woman*, an army magazine for servicewomen stationed abroad.

In 1941, Pineles married

William Golden, who would later pioneer the field of corporate communications at CBS. After being prematurely widowed in 1959, Pineles married the designer Will Burtin in 1961, the former art director of *Fortune* and the progenitor of modern information design.

When Pineles was remembered at a memorial last January at the Art Directors Club, a few speakers fondly recalled her relationship with these men and "the superb dinners she would prepare," as if that were her claim to fame. While she admitted learning a great deal about typography from the



In her catalogues for Parsons School of Design, Pineles played with the apple and orange as symbols of the school's locations in New York and L.A.



meticulous Golden, and visual organization from the mercurial Burtin, Pineles was a master in her own right.

As art director of *Seventeen*, Pineles helped change American illustration from a saccharine and sentimental form of visual mimicry into an interpretive and expressive art. She not only helped launch the illustration careers of Seymour Chwast and Robert Andrew Parker, but she commissioned illustration from "fine artists" such as Ben Shahn, Jacob Lawrence, Kuniyoshi and Raphael Soyer. Believing that her audience of young women was sophisticated enough to appreciate visual invention, she gave her artists unprecedented freedom. Rather than force them to mimic a passage from a story, as was the convention, Pineles allowed them to "paint what they felt." With photography, she was equally unconventional. She despised the esoterica and haughtiness of *Vogue's* fashion photography and instead urged her photographers to focus on real-life situations in creative ways. "Make the models look normal," was her directive.

Type was as important as image. Pineles developed sound typographic principles on which *Seventeen*, and later *Charm*, were based. But she had a wonderful sense of style, too. Nothing Pineles did was formulaic. Type was designed based on the same expressive mandates as was illustration, which endowed many of her layouts with a timeless quality that has disappeared from magazines today.

FEATS OF CLAY

Imetal, the world's largest producer of terra cotta construction tiles, showed a Gallic appreciation for whimsy with the choice of "Hommage à Bernard Palissy" as the theme of its 1991 Imetal Prize for ceramic creation. The annual contest, open to artists of all nationalities working in France, boasts one of France's richest prizes—100,000FF (\$20,000).

Palissy, a 16th century ceramicist most famous for his "rustique figuline" platters laden with lifelike three-dimensional plants, fish and reptiles, was a full-blown Renaissance eccentric who scandalized bourgeois Parisians by burning his furniture in the Louvre courtyard in order to fire his clay. A Huguenot with a passion for the natural sciences and utopian literature, Palissy only narrowly escaped being burned at the stake himself through the grace of Henry IV who described the artist as "France's finest fool."

Seafood and furnishings flambé were predictably popular motifs for the 25 finalists whose work is now on view at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. Of particular note: K'roll and Olivier Lerch's playful langoustine soup tureen entitled "Home for the Lobsters."

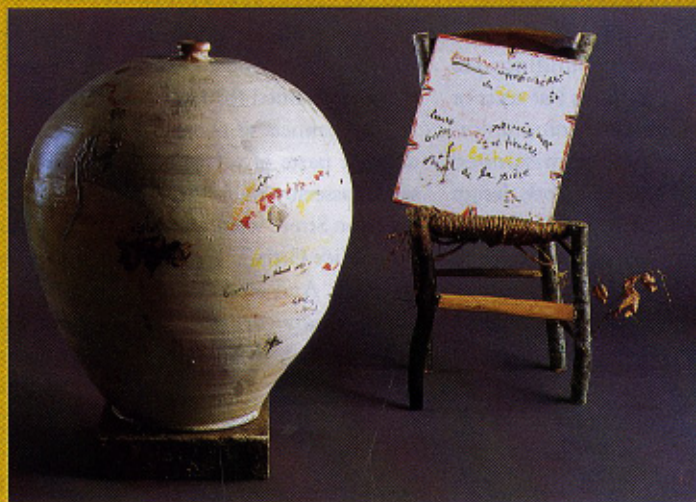
However, none of the artists present at the March 13th awards ceremony took a more organic approach to Palissy's passion for exotic zoology than Claude Varian, an artist from Prissac who works with traditional potter's wheels and wood burning kilns.

Varlan asked the Vincennes zoo for sample animal droppings to mix with glazes that he impressionistically daubed over the surface of a vase (with appropriate details of provenance). An explanatory title was placed on a partially-charred chair à la Palissy. "It was quite a learning experience," said Varlan, pointing to a clear Chinese glaze near the vase lip. "That's Panda shit. It's pure because they only eat bamboo. Zebra was the worst. It's almost unmeltable."

Despite this nose-wracking effort, Varlan's work did not take first prize. "What could I expect?" he shrugged philosophically. "C'est de la merde." Pierre Baey from the Languedoc professed to be less interested in Palissy's work than many of the others. "I say it's a dirty trick when you get clay asparagus in your dinner dish," he explained. Baey did win first prize, however, with an ingenious play on Palissy's ceramics that used construction tiles to assemble "imaginary cities" in the basins of two enormous clay platters.

Works by Imetal finalists and winners are on display at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, through June 23. —Corinne LaBalme.

Interpreting Palissy's organic motifs quite literally, Imetal finalist Claude Varian used animal droppings to enhance the color of his glazes.



Until forced to retire, Pineles was a vigorous teacher at Parsons School of Design. Towards the end of her tenure I was twice honored to participate in one of her publication classes as a "critic." Watching Pineles, then in her seventies, interact with her students provided insight into how she must have been as an art director years before. No idea was

too far out, no style too radical. She was not dogmatically conservative or rigidly set in her ways. Her only concern was how effectively the content of her students' proposed magazines was communicated. Indeed my own response to some of the more stylized work was far more conservative than her approach.

Cipe Pineles' legacy does not hinge on being the first

woman member of the Art Directors Club of New York; nor on being the art director and designer of much excellent commercial and institutional work; nor on being a teacher with the gift to inform and inspire. Rather, anyone who ever spent time with Pineles knows that she was simply "One of the Best."

—Steven Heller