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Face to face with Kiko Farkas
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1. Please tell us about graphic design in Brazil. How long graphic design has been formed academically and professionally?

Graphic design teaching started in the beginning of the sixties in only one school in Rio de Janeiro with teachers from the Ulm school in Germany. It was the very only school in Brazil since mid eighties when other schools opened. Nowadays there are more than 380 design schools in Brazil, in the fields of fashion, product and graphic. There is a movement in Brazilian congress to create a law requirement to regulate the design activity.

2. Sao Paulo or Rio de Janeiro? Which one of these two cities are more important; and how they have influenced graphic design. What are their roles?

Rio de Janeiro used to be Brazilian capital before Brasilia was built. It had all important companies and government structure. After the capital moved, it lost its importance, although is still the center of Brazilian entertaining industry. (TV network station, Rede Globo (which has a very big important dramaturgic production, studios, writers, actors etc) and also Brazilian cinema and music industry). São Paulo is today the most important city in Latin America. Headquarters of the most important companies like banks, car, mining...you name it. São Paulo is among the best selling branches of all major luxury brands (Luis Vuitton, MontBlanc, Gucci etc).

Most of the artistic foundations and important museums are in Sao Paulo, thus, cultural institutional life is much more important in my city.

There is more work for designers in SP than in Rio, but this may change because the Olympic games.

3. Can we say that Latin America has its own specific graphic design? Why did you mention somewhere that “Being a designer in Brazil means working for the minority, the very few.”?

I don't believe Latin America has a specific graphic design. When I mentioned that I was referring to the fact that our country is mainly musical. Musical and baroque! Design has a kind of minimal, or functional which is opposed in some way of our natural being as a culture. So, design is not a natural thing to Brazilians as it is to Japanese, Dutch or Germans.

4. Please tell us about your studio - Máquina Estúdio.

Máquina Estúdio is a place where I work with my two assistants and a do-it-all person (financial, agenda and also commercial proposals). We work mainly in the cultural area, with an important publishing side. It goes from annual reports to children's books and illustration with a strong stop in books and bookcovers. We also do identities, posters, signages, but almost only on cultural field. I like to work on my own and let assistants to work on their own also with my direction, which is something I am liking very much lately. On all projects the shared authorship is credited. Besides being the way like to work, I believe strongly that personal work (approach, way of thinking) is the best way to create a good relationship with clients and the market.

5. There are lots of influences of art and architecture, literature and music, and folk-art of Brazil in your works. Is that right?

I studied architecture, I love to read and I love books and paper. I used to play guitar in a group until the day i realized that I would never play as good as I wanted. But music has always inspired so much. I wouldn't say that brazilian folk-art is very present in the work I do. I see myself as a designer with lots of influences, and surely living in Brazil is a strong influence. I could say the way I use colors is perhaps "tropical" or brazilian.

6. Color, firm, layers, geometrical patterns, rhythm, pen-drawn have seen in your works. Where is the source of these?

I like patterns, tiles, rhythm, sequences, motion. I think maybe is a kind of subtle movement underlying in everything I see or listen to. I can see (capture or imagine) this movement easily and express it in the form of an image. It's like a game for me.

7. You have your sketch book with yourself everywhere. What is the role of these drawings in your works?

My sketches are a kind of relaxation. I really don't use my drawings as a source for works. Sometimes when I have an specific illustration job, i can go on sketching but most of the time is only the desire to register a determined detail of a tree or silhouette in the streets. As I said before, I like to draw a row of windows or some combination of lines extarcted from reality.

8. What is design for music? How weekly and monthly poster designs for music started for Orquestra Sinfonica do Estado de Sao Paulo?

When I started with these posters I had in mind that I should challenge myself to do something different from all I saw before in classical music imagery. The client was the maestro and musical director of the orchestra, and he told me he wanted a modern and contemporary visual signature for the institution, so, my challenge fitted perfectly to his aim. We did more that 300 posters in a 4 years period, almost one poster per week, and that was a good condition because although beeing very little time to think, it encouraged and freed ourselves from excess of criticism and kept us risking in every possible direction to express musical emotion.

9. What is design for literature and poetry? You did dozen of different book cover designs for Enrique Vila-Matas, Nobel prize winner, J. M. Coetzee, and George Orwell. Please tell us about more about these works.

Designing book covers is a mix of poster and packaging design. The message has to be at the same time abstract enough to let readers imagine what is inside but also catchy to get their attention among thousands of covers in a bookshelf. Most of the time we have to get the "spirit" of the book/ author. Sometimes when it's a best-seller then we have to go really commercial. Covers for books that have a film adaptation most of the time must have a picture of the film. We always work with the editor's support, and of course we can't read them all. I like to have book covers in the studio because it's fast and the assistants can do a really free work and sign it.

10. Do you use your illustrations and drawings for your designs? What is the boundary of Illustration and drawing with design for you?

Drawing is my primary way of expression. It's always thru drawing that I think visually. I can't have a conversation on any visual subject without a pencil and paper. It's the way I can show my ideas or comments about a particular issue. Sometimes the drawing is the best way to say what I want.

11. How much are you involved in design and illustration of children books?

I love illustrate for children though I don't do it often because I take too long to do a book and it doesn't pay off. So, I do maybe one very two years. I like to draw funny and carzy impossible things that children look at and understand very well.

12. I watched a short film of you playing football with your colleagues in studio. It is interesting to know how football could play a role in your life and work?

We have an old football half-filled in the studio. It stays there and sometimes we just play controlling it for some minutes. Then, it hits a computer or a cup full of pens and we stop.

I always liked and played football and it has an important place in brazilian culture because is very spontaneous and reveals our real spirit. I was very happy illustrating Jorge Amado's book *A bola e o goleiro* because I have to study a lot of it.