

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

Thomas F. Coleman

(1934 - 2022)

Thomas F. Coleman passed away at age 88 on March 30, 2022. He was a professor of graphic design in the former School of Fine Arts in the College of Arts and Sciences, which later became a part of the Eskenazi School of Art, Architecture + Design, Indiana University, Bloomington.

Born in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1934, Coleman enlisted in the United States Navy in 1952 following graduation from high school and served for four years. Coleman received a bachelor's degree in graphic design from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 1961. He then attended Yale University and received a Master of Fine Arts degree in 1963. While at Yale, he studied under Alvin Eisenman, Norman Ives, Rob Roy Kelly, Herbert Matter, Paul Rand, and Bradbury Thompson — all celebrated graphic design practitioners and among the most influential graphic design educators of the time. Their ideas became the basis of Coleman's graphic design practice and were later key to his approach to graphic design education.

Upon completion of his M.F.A. degree, he worked for the General Motors Styling Staff as a graphic designer at the General Motors Technical Center in Warren, Michigan. Following this, Coleman worked at IBM in Rochester, Minnesota where he was a staff graphic designer, manager of the Graphic Design and Photo Lab Office, and senior graphic designer at the Design Center.

Coleman accepted the position of associate professor in the School of Fine Arts at Indiana University in 1971, serving as the head of the graphic design area.

Coleman was a steadfast advocate for intelligent, compelling design. Design was not about aesthetics alone, rather aesthetics in service of the message. If used responsibly, design had the potential to have social impact and to improve the quality of life. This can be seen throughout his teaching career and in his design practice.

Upon his arrival at the IU School of Fine Arts and the graphic design area, Coleman redesigned the curriculum to not only bring it up to date, but to also make it socially relevant. One aspect of that redesign was how to best prepare students for entry into the graphic design profession within a liberal arts curriculum. Coleman was a believer in and proponent of the importance of civic engagement and social responsibility. Student projects in his classes were replete with assignments for various offices, departments, and programs within the university as well as numerous non-profit entities throughout the community. Both students and their community partners received an education about the graphic design profession. One example is the Bloomington 4th Street Festival of the Arts and Crafts logo that was designed by students as a class project and is still in use today. Courses taught by other design faculty were influenced by Coleman's thinking and adopted a similar strategy. It remains a vital component of the program to this day.

Coleman had extremely high standards as an educator, and he demanded the very best from his students. Consequently, his students have excelled in design practice and teaching positions throughout the country and their work has garnered recognition and innumerable awards from the graphic design community. As Peg Faimon, the founding dean and professor of the Sidney and Lois Eskenazi School of Art, Architecture + Design at IU relates, “Tom was my mentor and teacher in the IU Graphic Design program, and it was his connection to IBM that led me to a transformational internship experience and then later to Yale for my Master of Fine Arts. He was a great influence in my life, as he was for so many in Bloomington and beyond. He served as the head of graphic design for many years and the chair of the IU fine arts department from 1975-1980. He also served many community and national organizations. As a teacher/scholar/professional designer he was a wonderful role model, and I will forever be in his debt.”

In the mid-1980’s, the graphic design profession began its transition away from an analog to a digital activity. While always maintaining that graphic design is essentially a thinking and problem-solving activity, Coleman realized the effect the computer would have as a tool on the discipline and incorporated it into the curriculum. He also understood its far-ranging impact and served on university committees including the Academic Computing Policy Committee and chaired the Student Technology Fund Project Review Committee.

Those are two of many examples of Coleman’s tireless service. He served the university, the design and art professions, and the community throughout his career. For the university, he served as chair of the Henry Radford Hope School of Fine Arts, on the College of Arts and Sciences Tenure Committee, the Office of Women’s Affairs Advisory Committee, and the Indiana University Arts Coordinating Council. For the city, he served as president of the City of Bloomington Arts Commission, vice-president of the Monroe County Arts Complex, and on the Bloomington Area Arts Council Advisory Board. For the region, he served on design arts grant review panels for the Indiana Arts Commission and as a board member for the Mid-America Festival of the Arts. Nationally, he served as a member of the National Endowment for the Arts design evaluation committees and received the Outstanding Contributions Award from the National Zoological Park in Washington, DC. For the community, his service went beyond art and design to include the environment as evidenced by his work for the City of Bloomington Tree Commission and Monroe County Tree Board. He was even named Tree Steward of the Year by Indiana Urban Forest Council in 2004.

Coleman was an active designer with a long list of clients. As one can imagine, given his enthusiasm and concern for civic engagement and public good, his client list weighed heavily toward non-profit organizations. His professional involvement included work for and with educational institutions, health care, the arts, the environment, and communities but also included large corporations such as IBM and John Deere.

A former student and longtime design educator, upon reminiscing about Coleman, states, “Tom had the ability to identify the core of a design problem more quickly and more precisely than anyone I’ve ever known.” This, along with his mastery of visual form and typography, led to elegant and appropriate design solutions — many of which found their way into exhibitions, collections, and publications. His work was included in various prominent national and international design publications, including Art Direction Magazine, Architectural Record, Communication Arts, Industrial Design, International Poster Annual, New York Art Directors Annual, and Print Magazine. Additionally, his work was exhibited and

collected locally in Bloomington; across the U.S. in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York; and internationally in Paris, France, in Stuttgart and Köln, Germany, and in Warsaw, Poland.

As was appropriate for a graphic designer with an interest in politics, Coleman had a humdinger of a political campaign button collection. From the leanings of his collection, one could sense Coleman was an ardent Democrat. He was a keen observer of the national political scene but was also intimately involved in the workings of local politics. His design skills were sought after for over forty political campaigns. His avid interest in politics assured that one would find him in attendance at Democratic Headquarters during each and every election night gathering.

After his retirement, Coleman grew a handlebar mustache and beard. The mustache particularly would often attract compliments. It softened what could be, for some, a gruff exterior. He was intense in his dedication to design. He was deeply committed to the idea that graphic design is a tool for the common good and designers need to be engaged, involved, and responsible. He was also warmhearted. He welcomed students to his home, especially international students during the holidays. He befriended students who might be having a family crisis, and he would give a potential student a boost, psychologically or logistically, to enroll or apply to the program. He will be missed by many.

We request that this memorial resolution to Thomas Coleman be presented to the members of the Bloomington Faculty Council, that it be preserved in its minutes and archive, and that after its presentation copies be sent to members of his family including Pat Williams, Beth Coleman Valdetaro, Heidi Coleman Burton, Erick Coleman, Susan Coleman Snyder, Megan Williams van Eijk, Matthew Williams, Michael Williams, and Chris Williams.

Paul Brown

Faculty emeritus, Graphic Design

Indiana University Bloomington

Betsy Stirratt

Academic specialist; director, Grunwald Gallery of Art

Indiana University Bloomington

Tim Mather

Area head, Ceramics; associate professor, Ceramics

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