

featuring
Matthew Carter
Wim Crouwel
Paula Scher
Neville Brody
Massimo Vignelli
David Carson
Hermann Zapf
and others

We'll admit,

bracket serifs and x-height are not the sorts of things being discussed over backyard fences. If you don't know a bracket from a briquet, don't be alarmed; lofty and esoteric debates about the power of type are not the point here. The film joins many others in addressing the question of cultural goods: how we consume, interpret, and critique what surrounds us. Yes, even those things as innocuous and ubiquitous as type.

Plexifilm

holvetica

holvetica

gary
hustwit

a documentary film
by gary hustwit

Produced and Directed by Gary Hustwit **Editor** Shelby Siegel **Director of Photography** Luke Geissbuhler **Motion Graphics** Trollbäck & Co. **Additional Photography** Colin Brown Gary Hustwit Pete Sillen Chris Wetton Ben Wolf **Additional Editing** Laura Weinberg **Sound Editing** Brian Langman **Sound Mixing** Andy Kris **Sound Recordists** Nara Garber Dan Johnson Sam Pullen Jorg Kidowski Victor Horstink Reto Stamm **Music** The Album Leaf Battles Caribou Chicago Underground Quartet El Ten Eleven Four Tet Kim Hiorthøy Motohiro Nakashima Sam Prekop **Production Assistance** Tyrone Braithwaite Amy Harrington Christina Ross

Plexifilm

swiss
dots

veer

COLOR
80 MINS

1.78:1
WIDESCREEN

DOLBY
DIGITAL

2
PAL

DVD

Plexifilm

vetica

notes



In defense of the people in this film,

it is hard to be down-to-earth and typographically-minded. If typographers feel a little set apart, it might be because the rest of the (down-to-earth) world all but ignores precisely what keeps them awake at night. Bracket serifs and x-height are not the sorts of things being discussed over backyard fences.

If you yourself are a pre-enthusiast who does not know a bracket from a briquet, be ye not alarmed. You can be sure that lofty and esoteric debates about the power of type are not the point here. The film joins many others in addressing the question of cultural goods: how we consume, interpret, and critique what surrounds us. Yes, even those things as innocuous and ubiquitous as type. Helvetica is not terribly unlike Coca-Cola; someone invented it, and we can no longer imagine the world without it.

As the end of the film proclaims, we now live in a society where people can, with relatively little effort, engage in culture-making via visual communication. Moreover, we find that the widespread interest and aptitude cannot even be contained in the graphic design industry (once so elusive). There are generations of people who now make daily decisions about typefaces. The timeliness of this seemingly peripheral documentary is undeniable.

But perhaps more importantly, Helvetica: The Film was made just *in* time. We see the typeface reaching a stage through which the very best design elements must pass: the once-potent meaning

dilutes until the element sits in everyone's toolbox, stripped of innate power and ready to be freely reappropriated. Imagine the era when the manufacture of blue and purple first became possible; the colors pointed emphatically toward wealth and majesty until the masses learned to use them. Helvetica, too, has meant so much that she begins to mean nothing. Far from a negative observation, this means Helvetica is nearly ready to contain our indiscernible future.

As Helvetica has now participated in fifty years' worth of visual culture, it will soon seem foolish to pin it to any one mission or line of thought. No meteoric trend, Helvetica has stood for universal goodwill, firm supremacy, savvy gracefulness, and stoic anonymity. The generations to come will wield Helvetica in their own way, to their own ends, far removed from the history that now fans the embers of debate.

rachel leigh

universal goodwill, firm supremacy,
savvy gracefulness, stoic anonymity

