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Lecturer at the Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology in Warsaw.

Doctor of Arts in Graphic Design. She specializes in non-linear digital graphics, design and transdisciplinary research on contemporary art.

Her artistic work includes original series in which she combines the visual layer with spirituality and mathematical as well as encoding structures. In her paintings, she uses her own method of decoding, called Fusion Decode EXTRA, treating them as active portals of consciousness.

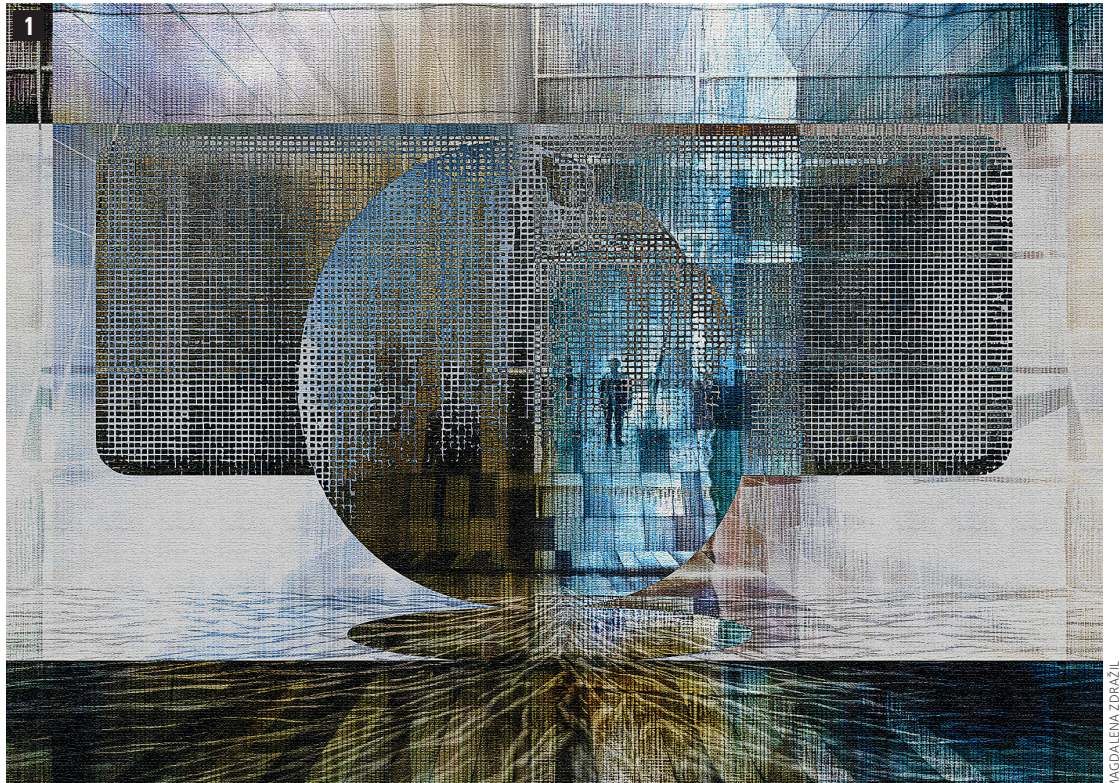
Her research and artistic practice introduce new perspectives on understanding art as a tool for transformation. She participates in exhibitions and projects, contributing their unique visual and energetic language to contemporary graphics. She finds her passion in conjoining art, science, spiritual experience, and new technologies.

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Beauty Is Not Enough

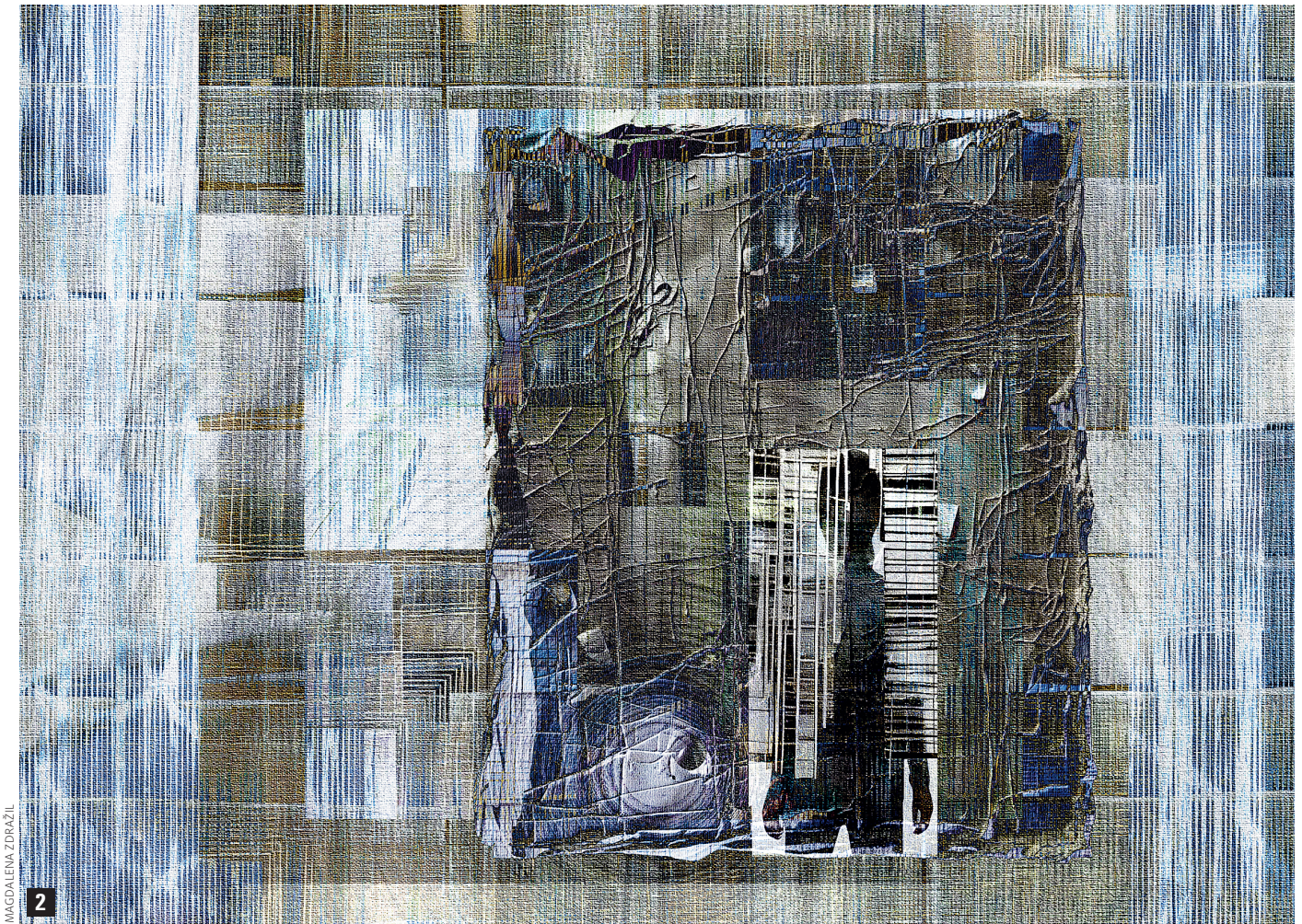
DESIGN IN THE SERVICE OF IDEAS

Graphic design is more than aesthetics – it is a language that shapes social awareness, and responsible design is born of courage, authenticity, and balance.



MAGDALENA ZDRAŽIL

„When I create, I know that my work can be like a breath of fresh air for someone who has long been suffocating in a heavy atmosphere. It is not just graphics – it is a breath that liberates, restores peace and opens up space for new possibilities.”



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The world we live in is created every day – through words, images, gestures, and ideas. Graphic design is no exception. It is the language we use to talk about ourselves and what is important to us. Every graphic, poster, or piece of packaging conveys an idea. And this is precisely where the responsibility begins. It determines whether the project will be merely an aesthetic façade or whether it will become a bridge to truth and social change.

In my opinion, the creative process and ideas are very closely related. Creativity is not an addition to our lives; it is the driving force that allows us to change reality. Once, in an interview, when asked about the source of my motivation, I answered spontaneously, “For me, creativity is the moment when an ordinary sheet of paper or a screen suddenly comes to life – when we become creators of something that really excites and adds value to the world.” This sentence often comes back to me because it reflects how

much I believe in the transforming power of creation. It means that each of us is endowed with a possibility to create a better tomorrow.

Creativity vs. Utility

In practice, however, this power is sometimes diminished. Beautiful packaging is supposed to attract the customer, and profit becomes the primary goal. Too rarely do we ask: what is inside? Is the product harmful to people or the environment? If we focus solely on the visual layer, we become complicit in blurring the truth.

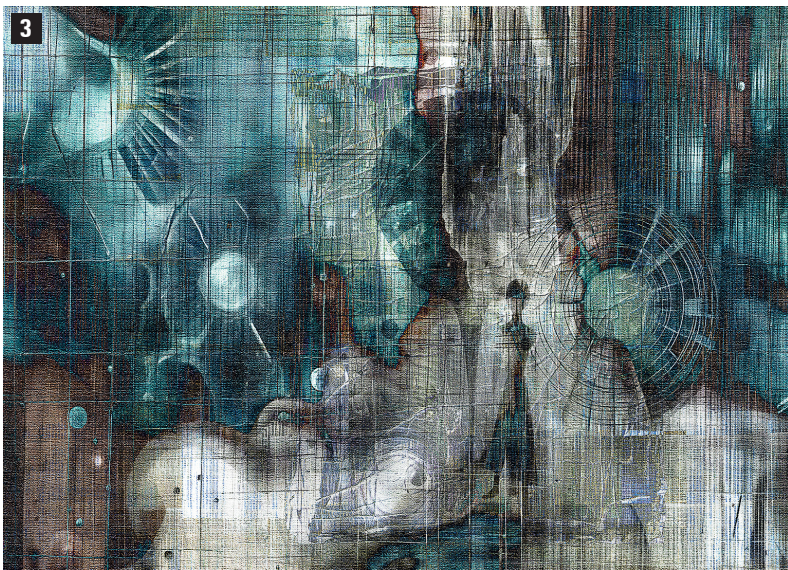
Therefore, the designer’s responsibility is not only to create beauty, but above all to care for the good of the recipient and the community. So, what is creativity? Creativity can be learned, and in that sense, anyone can be creative. It is the ability to deviate from the familiar paths, explore routes different from those we are used to. It requires courage, multifaceted perspective, and the ability to learn from mistakes. Slip-ups are the best teachers, and humility is the most precious virtue. Without it, it is easy to fall into complacency, which blocks the path to further development. However, creativity does not exist without utility. Even the most original idea becomes an empty gesture if it does not work. It is a bit like when I bought shoes that

Graphic 1
Conscious Passage,
70×50 cm.

Hidden image code reading
obtained with the Fusion
Decode method:
“Walk consciously across the
threshold – the light is
waiting in your heart. Don’t
stop at the painting – turn it
into a gate and enter
the depths”

Graphic 2
Hidden Exit,
70×50 cm.

Hidden image code reading
obtained with the Fusion
Decode method:
“Find a hidden exit – the
illusion crumbles as you look
deep inside. Behind the
curtain, the path of freedom
awaits. Don’t be afraid – your
heart knows the direction”



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Graphic 3
In the Matrix,
70 × 50 cm.

Hidden image code reading
obtained with the Fusion
Decode method:

"In the matrix, recognize the light – it penetrates through the illusion. Don't become entangled in the net – your soul is free. The path of return starts with a look into the depths"

looked amazing – but after a few minutes of walking, all I felt was pain. The same applies to a project: if it does not work, all its beauty becomes useless.

Balance

When I came across the philosophy of the Far East, especially the idea of yin and yang, I recognized a reflection of my own creative experiences. I have often found that courage without caution leads to a dead end, and caution without courage leads to stagnation. It is only when they are combined that the process is complete. Without balance, the creative process becomes distorted: excessive caution leads to a loss of confidence in one's own capabilities, while excessive bravado produces flashy projects that may turn out to be futile.

I have often come across ads that wowed with their form but were ineffective, because no one knew what product they were advertising. True creativity is the art of combining courage with humility, innovation with care for the recipient. Everyday life is full of patterns – so obvious that we often fail to notice them. It is like a fish in water: it does not see the medium it swims in until it is briefly hauled onto the shore. That is exactly what design education is for – enabling us to recognize the context we are stuck in and consciously choose a different path. Patterns, education, upbringing, and fear of judgement can all block creativity. However, if we believe in ourselves, we can view criticism as a tool for development rather than an obstacle. That is why, in my own teaching approach, I introduce exercises breaking up routine: painting on shirts, creating works with unusual materials, improvising in graphic work. These exercises demonstrate that there is always another way. I have seen many times in classes how a simple comment from a student can

suddenly open up a completely new perspective for the entire group. Often, it is not a grand gesture but a tiny spark – a single sentence, drawing, or idea – that sets in motion a process from which new ideas are born.

Graphics As a Process

Another good example is authenticity and commitment in artistic practice. In my case, authenticity does not mean perfection, but truth and the courage to be myself. I strive to combine these values in my work. I create using my own technique of non-linear digital graphics, for which a special code has been developed to read the hidden meaning of an image. I do not create merely for the eye – I create for the heart and the expansion of awareness. Each of my works has its own concept and inner message. When the recipient deciphers this hidden code, they enter a process that can become a catalyst for reflection and personal transformation. The image becomes a motivator, a subtle guide, or an invitation to pause. Through this approach, graphic design becomes a medium of consciousness – something more than mere decoration. It becomes an act of co-creating a better tomorrow. In this case, I implemented a scientific programming experiment. I developed my own code – Fusion Decode (designed specifically for bitmap images):

- **12×3 layering** – the original work is divided into sectors; the presence of lines is recorded as bits → letters A1Z26.
- **Turn-code** – the image is scanned spirally from the center in eight directions (N, NE, E, SE, S, SW, W, NW), converting turns into letters.
- **Combining sequences** from both methods → a string of characters.
- **Extra key** – Caesar cipher, grid, permutations, segmentation → extraction of complete sentences.

Using the Fusion Decode method, any image can be decoded to uncover its hidden content message. Figures 1–4 illustrate the results of sample decoding of my original works.

The above-mentioned technique of non-linear digital graphics is founded on the assumption that an image is not single-layered or confined to a simple linear narrative. On the contrary, every image exists as a superposition of layers of meaning that coexist within a single frame. Superposition in art – similar to that in quantum physics – means that different potentials – aesthetic, symbolic, emotional, and spiritual – overlap simultaneously. When viewing an image, the recipient selects (often unconsciously) which of these potentials "descends" into their experience. Therefore, each image is a unique encounter: my intention as a creator meets the recipient's inner readiness. From this perspective, non-linear graphics is not an illustration, but a process. Each layer – color, shape, hidden code – resonates

with others, creating a semantic field in which transformation is possible. Reading an image through by Fusion Decode is one of the levels of this field, but physical, emotional, or intuitive sensations are equally important. It is superposition that makes non-linear graphics an open system rather than a closed message. It is an art that does not provide answers but initiates questions and sets consciousness in motion. That is why images can act as motivators of transformation – they are tools of dialogue through which each recipient discovers their own truth.

As this example shows, science and technology can play also an important role in the service of ideas. New technologies – artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and digital tools – open up endless possibilities. However, as I always emphasize, “No algorithms or machines can replace human sensitivity, a sense of aesthetics, or spiritual commitment.” Technology should support, not replace. Used with sensitivity, it strengthens the message and opens new paths; used thoughtlessly, it leads to chaos and overstimulation.

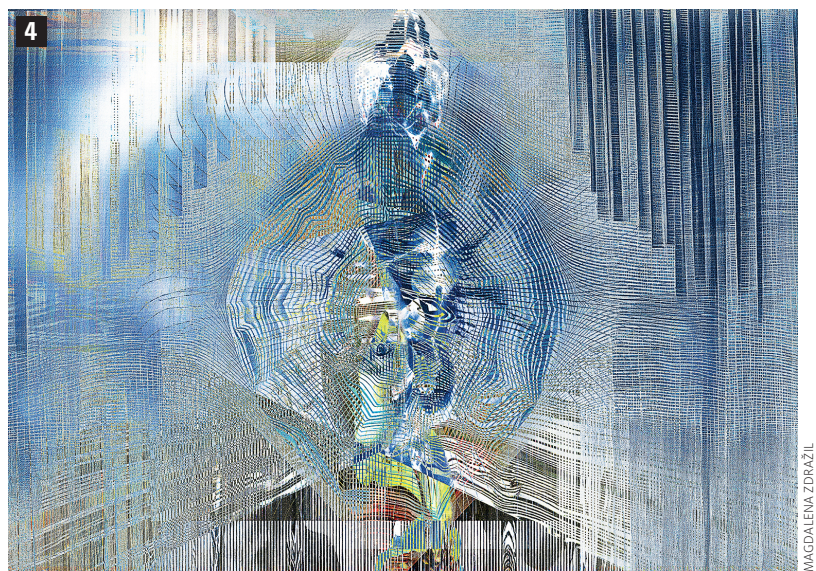
Therefore, in design education, it is essential to combine tradition and modernity. Students should experience manual work – painting, sculpture, workshop graphics – before immersing themselves in the world of multimedia. Only then does technology become a natural extension of their work, rather than a substitute for it.

Social Context

The history of graphic design provides many examples demonstrating how strong an impact images can have on society. In Poland, the Polish School of Posters played a particularly important role. The works of Henryk Tomaszewski, Waldemar Świerzy, and Jan Lenica were not merely advertisements, but also vehicles for reflection and commentary on sociopolitical reality (as discussed by Steven Heller in *Design Literacy: Understanding Graphic Design*). At a time when other forms of expression were restricted, the poster became a medium of freedom.

Global campaigns have functioned in a similar way – for example, Bauhaus projects, in which the combination of art, craft, and technology had a clear social dimension. The goal was to create design that served people and was accessible to broad audiences (see Philip B. Meggs and Alston W. Purvis, *History of Graphic Design*). Today, ecological and social campaigns play a comparable role, such as the activities of Fridays for Future, in which simple, handmade posters have become a global symbol of concern for the future of the planet.

In reflections on the ethics of design, a special place is occupied by the *First Things First* manifesto of 1964 (updated in 2000), in which designers called on their colleagues to reject superficial advertising



goals in favor of projects that bring real social value. This demonstrates that responsibility in design is a recurring and ever-relevant topic.

If responsibility begins with an idea, then education should be a place where young designers learn to ask questions: for whom do I create? Does the content which I design help people, or does it merely manipulate their attention? In design education, approaches such as design thinking or service design are increasingly used, allowing students to test ideas in real social contexts. My own teaching experience shows me that tasks based on real problems – for example, projects for educational campaigns on mental health, ecology, or social exclusion – teach more than even the most beautifully designed advertising poster.

Design education must therefore combine technical skills and aesthetics with the development of ethical awareness. As Victor Papanek observed, “the designer, more than anyone else, shapes the human environment” (*Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change*). This statement underscores the importance of responsibility: every project is a decision that carries consequences.

To sum up, responsibility starts with an idea. It determines whether our work will be merely an ornament or an impulse to change. The history of design shows that the most important graphic works have never been neutral – they always carried ideas that shaped consciousness. Creativity, when it combines courage, authenticity, and responsibility, has the power to transform both individuals and the world. Therefore, design education, science, and artistic practice should create a shared field in which we learn not only technical craft, but also care for others and for the planet. Graphic design then ceases to be decoration – it becomes an act of co-creating of reality, in which every image can be a “breath of relief” for another person. ■

Graphic 4
Soul,
70×50 cm.

Hidden image code reading obtained with the Fusion Decode method:
“The soul is a light passing through all layers. Your center remains clean and unchanged.
Continue ascending – the source is waiting for you”

Further reading:

Chang, C., *Creativity and Taoism: A Study of Chinese Philosophy, Art & Poetry*. New York, 1970 (new edition: London 2011).

First Things First Manifest (1964/2000). Available at: <https://www.designhistory.org>

Heller, S., *Design Literacy: Understanding Graphic Design*. New York, 2003.

Meggs, P.B., Purvis, A.W., *Historia grafiki*. Warszawa, 2016.

Papanek, V., *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change*. Chicago, 1985.

Słomka, M., *Kreatywność podstawą tworzenia* (rozmowa z M. Zdrażił). „Szkoła Artystyczna”, 2024.

Zdrażił, M., *Zrozumieć kreatywność*. Warszawa, 2019.