

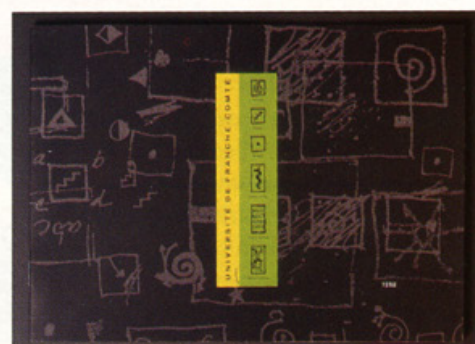
The Changing Face of French Graphic Design

By Lycette Nelson

Photography: Marc Pataut



Left: A Zask-designed spread from *En Direct* for an article on an ethnology institute's research. Below, left: Zask's identity for the dance company Ris & Danceries uses the symbols for actual baroque dance steps. Below, right: The cover of a brochure with the identity Zask developed for the Université de Franche Comté; the six symbols represent types and areas of study.



Catherine Zask

Catherine Zask is committed to doing design she likes and working with people who share an understanding of the project at hand. "I don't work on projects I don't like," Zask says.

Her criteria for a good project are based largely on the strength of the relationship between designer and client. Zask once stated at a conference, "The most important thing is to be in direct contact with the decision-makers or someone in a position to influence them. Once that's established, my only criterion is the quality of the relationship... A good client is above all a good partner."

The close connection between the quality of a project and the role of people in it is apparent when Zask speaks of one of her latest jobs: the identity for a language school—the Centre de linguistique appliquée de Besançon—where 3,000 people per year come to study language. The terms of the exchange—people, language, culture—inspire Zask: "It's really exciting to see all these people from all over brought together by language."

Zask graduated from the Ecole Supérieure des Arts Graphiques in

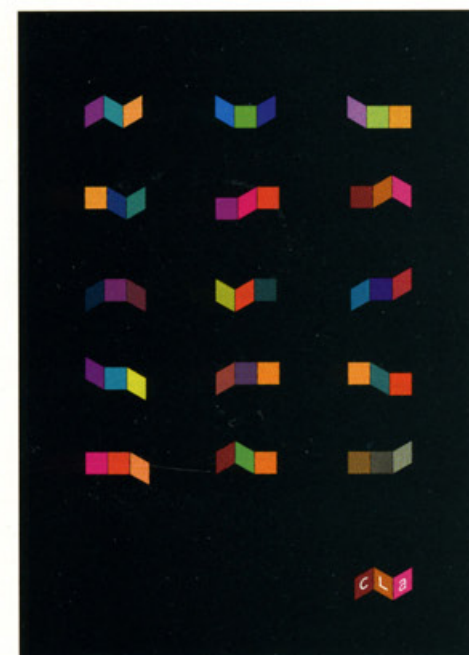


1984. After a brief stint as a designer for the book publisher Autrement and a trip to Australia that "made her see that there were more important things in life" than working

for someone else, she started freelancing in 1985 at the young age of 24.

Her first major client was the Université de Franche-Comté, a science and technical university located near the French/Swiss border. Working with the university's communications director, Zask created a comprehensive identity and communications system that unified the university's image in both its internal and external communications materials. Zask describes the process of trying to bring something new into the rigid organizational structure of the university. "It was only because we had so much energy against so much inertia that we got anything done."

Although Zask stopped designing communications materials for the university when a new president took over in 1991, she continued to design the-



Above: Zask's 1996 New Year's card for the Centre de linguistique appliquée de Besançon.

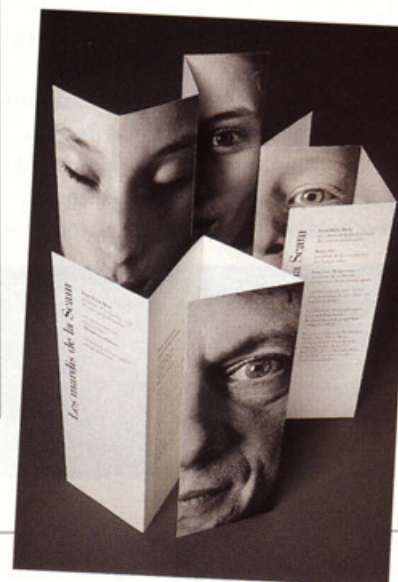
matic issues of a university publication called *En Direct* that appears 11 times a year. In late 1995, the university again changed presidents and some of the materials Zask had designed began to resurface. And the university has hired her again to design a directory of studies. "It's a true resurrection," she says.

A Year at the Villa Medici

Having already developed an impressive client list of cultural institutions that included the Musée départemental d'art ancien et contemporain/Epinal, the dance company Ris & Danceries and the Centre National des arts plastiques, in 1993 Zask received the prestigious Prix de Medici granted to 20 French artists each year by the Centre National des arts plastiques.

A "super-fellowship" for which the selection process is extremely competitive, the Prix de Medici grants its recipients one year at the Villa Medici in Rome with an apartment, a studio and a stipend. Zask took leave of her clients for the year she spent in Rome to concentrate exclusively on her own work—an ongoing study of letterforms as forms, "letters that no longer are letters."

Below: Zask designed this invitation for a 1995 series of lectures presented by the Société civile des auteurs multimédias, an organization of multimedia authors.



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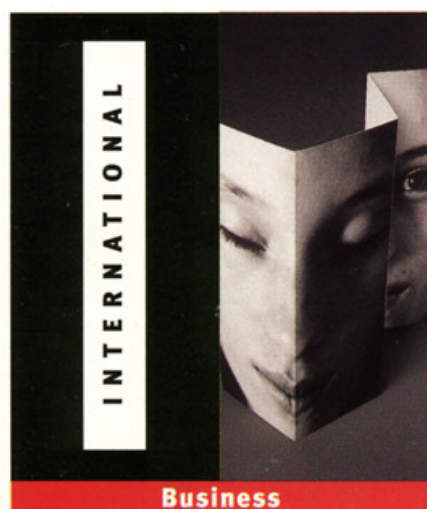
In addition to being completely enchanted with Rome, Zask found the studio, stipend and time to work that came with the fellowship "an unbelievable opportunity." Because a number of artists from different disciplines are all at the Villa Medici at once, the setting has enormous creative energy—as well as a hefty dose of ego.

With the honor of the Prix de Medici and her own past experience, Zask has had no problem building her business up since she returned to Paris in October 1994. Old clients have come back and new ones, such as the Société civile des auteurs multimédias and Centre de linguistique appliquée have sought her services to do their identity work and other projects.

Like Bernard, Zask moved into her new studio in the renovated building in the rue du Faubourg Saint Martin last summer. Except for her computer and a few pieces of furniture, the studio—a large rectangular space with

white walls on three sides and a fourth with windows that flood the studio with light—is nearly empty.

Having recently hired an assistant, Zask has had to arrange her studio to accommodate another workstation. "I think I'll keep the walls bare, though, to rest the eyes," she says. The openness of the studio seems to fit Zask's approach to her work—remain receptive, listen, take in, and then give visual expression to ideas in her own unique style.



Business