

# Reproductions

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At the end of the 19th century, Swiss arts and crafts schools began arranging student exhibitions on a regular basis in order to present what was taught and created in their classrooms and workshops to the interested public, experts, and potential students. In this way, the schools themselves also gained an overview of the state of their education, and could become aware of any need to formulate new goals.<sup>1</sup> The schools usually did not place the focus of these exhibitions on individual achievements, but on giving an overall picture of their educational programs.<sup>2</sup> However, in 1941 an extensive exhibition of student works by the arts and crafts department of the Allgemeine Gewerbeschule (AGS) Basel put its specialist class for graphic design in the foreground: the Fachklasse für angewandte Graphik.<sup>3</sup> This Fachklasse had been reformed during the previous ten years, and according to the school directorate itself, it had become one of its most important arts and crafts classes.<sup>4</sup> [Fig. 9]

This increase in significance may be one explanation for the fact that the 1941 exhibition was documented with a comparatively large series of photographs that reproduced the arrangement of student work on the exhibition walls.

[Figs. 10, 12, 14, 17, 19] This series of forty-nine black-and-white exhibition photographs provides us with an overall picture of AGS design and graphic design education in the early 1940s, a period that is otherwise only sparsely documented.<sup>5</sup> Although the photographs can provide evidence about certain educational principles, they also lure researchers into venturing interpretations that can turn out to be somewhat overhasty. This becomes clear when comparing the photographic reproductions with those student works that have been preserved, or with teaching materials and written documents.

For example, the fact that Hermann Eidenbenz's course Vorbereitendes Zeichnen<sup>6</sup> (Preparatory Drawing) for graphic designers included both black-and-white drawing exercises and colorful paper collages only becomes clear when we encounter an original student work from the Eidenbenz archive that initially seems to be identical to a work documented in the exhibition. [Figs. 10, 11] However, the teacher's signature on the original, its later dating (1943), and the 180-degree rotation indicates that although it is a very similar work, it is not the one shown in the photograph—and it implies that Eidenbenz's students most likely worked from templates in class.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, some of the student work from Ernst Keiser's courses for graphic design and chemigraphy apprentices was obviously based on templates. This becomes clear

when comparing the exhibition photograph [Fig. 12] with a work from the teacher's archives, entitled "template." [Fig. 13] According to Keiser's description, these exercises with geometric shapes and grids served as "familiarization with clean craftsmanship and technically correct use of tools and materials" (*Gewöhnung an handwerklich-sauberes Schaffen und technisch-richtigen Gebrauch von Werkzeug und Material*).<sup>8</sup> The same exercise was also taught in the first year of the Fachklasse für angewandte Graphik.<sup>9</sup>

The exhibition wall of the technical course Lithographie (Lithography) [Fig. 14] showed exercises that enabled the student to explore different drawing tools and the material characteristics of the lithography stone, [Fig. 15] and also featured a large variety of applied exercises. For example, an abstract advertisement with constructive lettering, [Fig. 16] points beyond the technical course Lithographie towards the applied graphic design courses taught by teachers such as Theo Ballmer. [Fig. 121]

The exhibition catalog also tells us that the section Fotografie (Photography) in the 1941 exhibition was Ballmer's responsibility. The exhibition photograph, [Fig. 17] however, does not let us discern that Ballmer's very technical photographic course was also extended to encompass applied work, such as the layout of a non-fiction book on animals that is preserved in the AGS library. [Fig. 18] Another exhibition

wall entitled “Schrift” showed the historical part of Ballmer’s lettering course, [Fig. 19] beginning with antique letters and continuing with their development. Ballmer had published a teaching concept in 1939 that included a timeline of letterform development, down to contemporary forms.<sup>10</sup> [Fig. 20] This teaching concept reveals that Ballmer also provided templates, which were then reproduced with minimal modifications by the students.

As shown in the case of the student exhibition of 1941, the installation views allow us to categorize and date originals (albeit approximately) that are often found unlabeled and undated in various collections, libraries, archives, and private estates.<sup>11</sup> Comparisons with originals or other documents, however, raise questions that take us away from the smooth surface of the photographs into the deeper layers of graphic design education. Their point of intersection shows us both what we can learn from such photographs, and when they in fact raise new questions.

- 1 See Kienzle 1923: 1–2.
- 2 See Gewerbemuseum Basel 1923: n.p. See also *Das Werk* 1941: XX.
- 3 In 1941, this class was called the “Fachklasse für angewandte Graphik.” However, over the decades, this terminology shifted several times. The most common name was “Fachklasse für Graphik.”
- 4 On the increase in importance of the Fachklasse für angewandte Graphik compared to other arts and crafts branches, such as decorative painting or glass painting, see Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel 1941b: 5. For the reorganization of the Fachklasse, see Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel 1938: n.p.
- 5 Little attention has so far been paid to this period, probably because of the difficult source situation. Only recently have certain overviews of the history of graphic design education touched on this period. See, for example, Hofmann 2016; Vetter, Leuenberger, & Eckstein 2017.
- 6 See Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel 1941a: 18.
- 7 The same exercise can be found on a documentary photograph in the private archives of Hermann Eidenbenz, where it is signed with the name (Theo) Ferrari. See Klein 2019: 158.
- 8 See Keiser 1939: n.p.
- 9 The exercise also exists in the archives of former Fachklasse students Ferdinand and Beatrice Afflerbach, Plakatsammlung der Schule für Gestaltung Basel, Box 28.
- 10 Ballmer did not name what he regarded as the most contemporary letterforms, but his diagram of the historical development of lettering ended with constructive lettering and handwriting—the two lettering styles that he used almost exclusively for his applied work at that time.
- 11 Student works that were shown in the exhibitions of the Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel also often do not contain signatures. The school claimed these as its intellectual property, as they were created under the auspices of its teachers. See Directorship of Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel 1920: n.p.

## Fächer und Lehrer

### Zeichenkurse

Farbe und Form: Fritz Baumann.

Projektionszeichnen, Perspektive und Schattenlehre: Paul Artaria, Jakob Mumenthaler.

Perspektivisches Skizzieren: Paul Artaria.

Gegenstands- und Modellzeichnen: Teo Eble, Ernst Buchner, Hermann Meyer.

Naturstudien und Landschaftszeichnen: Ernst Buchner, Hermann Meyer.

Gedächtniszeichnen: Teo Eble.

Schrift: Teo Ballmer.

Vorbereitendes Zeichnen für Graphiker: Hermann Eidenbenz.

### Praktische Kurse

Papier und Karton: Emil Kretz.

Holz- und Modellbau: Jakob Mumenthaler.

Arbeit in Ton und Gips: Emil Knöll.

Textilarbeit: J. M. Kocan.

## Fachklasse für Angewandte Graphik

Die Anforderungen des Wirtschaftslebens an den Graphiker sind seit dem Ende des Weltkrieges, als die Bedürfnisse einer gesteigerten und zugleich differenzierten Propaganda zu befriedigen waren, ganz erheblich größer geworden. Nicht nur bedient sich heute die Werbegraphik sämtlicher graphischer Techniken, nämlich außer der Lithographie in steigendem Maß auch der Photographie und der auf ihr beruhenden photomechanischen Reproduktionsverfahren, der Typographie usw., sondern auch die Technik der Werbung selbst hat sich durch die Beobachtung ihrer psycho-

Fig. 9 Spread from exhibition catalog *Ausstellung von Schülerarbeiten der kunstgewerblichen Abteilung* showing an article about the Fachklasse für angewandte Graphik, Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel, 1941.

logischen Grundlagen außerordentlich entwickelt und differenziert. Die Fachklasse hat die Aufgabe, Kräfte auszubilden, die diesen sehr hohen, vielseitigen Ansprüchen genügen können. Sie ist derjenige Teil der Abteilung, der sich in den letzten Jahren am meisten verändert hat. Neue Fächer auf technischem Gebiet, die Typographie und Photographie, wurden eingeführt. Aber auch sachlich erweiterten sich ihre Aufgaben. Das Gebiet der Mode, das der Werbung durch die Graphik besonders bedürftig ist, und das Spezialgebiet der Zeichen und Marken wurden zum Gegenstand besonderer Kurse gemacht; durch einen Vorbereitungskurs werden die Schüler in die Art des graphischen Darstellens eingeführt; ein Kurs über „Werbelehre“ gibt dem Schüler den notwendigsten Aufschluß über die psychologischen Grundlagen der Reklame.

Man hört etwa einmal Stimmen, die in Erinnerung an die Plakate von Hodler, Amiet, Cardinaux und andern Künstlern einen künstlerischen Niedergang des schweizerischen Plakates feststellen wollen. Sie vergessen, daß das künstlerische Gelegenheitsplakat, mit dem der glänzende Aufstieg der schweizerischen Plakatkunst begann, heute nur einen kleinen Teil des Gesamtgebietes der Werbegraphik darstellt und daß in unserer Zeit der Graphiker vor die Aufgabe gestellt ist, nicht nur der Ankündigung von Festen, Kunstausstellungen, Aufführungen usw. zu dienen, sondern die Bedürfnisse der im Konkurrenzkampf stehenden Wirtschaft zu befriedigen. Hierbei ist es mit künstlerischer Eigenart und Phantasie allein nicht getan. Es gilt, den Werbezweck lebendig zu erfassen und für ihn die adäquate künstlerische Form zu finden. Dies verlangt aber eine von der individuell künstlerischen Arbeit verschiedene, sehr eigenartige, aber durchaus nicht weniger wertvolle geistig-künstlerische Leistung.

Die schweizerischen Schulen, vor allem Basel und Zürich, dürfen darauf hinweisen, daß sie an der Schaffung eines Stammes ausgezeichnete graphischer Kräfte und damit auch am internationalen Ansehen der schweizerischen Graphik einen wesentlichen Anteil haben.

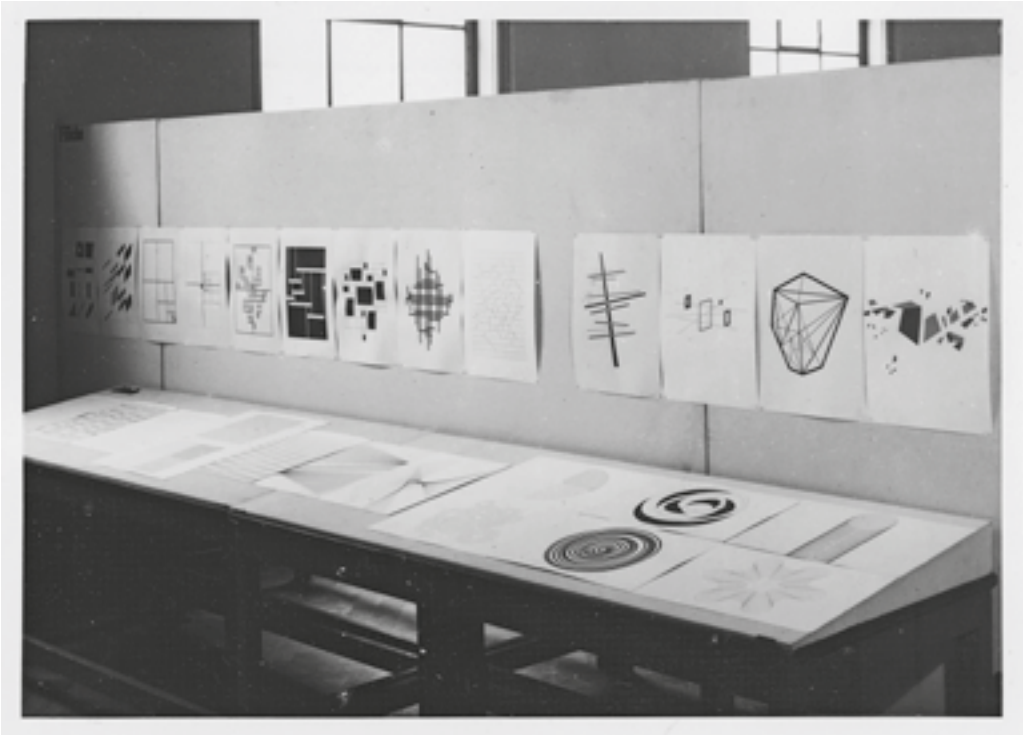


Fig. 10 Installation view of the “Fläche” panel and the “Linie” table, exhibition of student work, anonymous (photographer), Hermann Eidenbenz (teacher), Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel, 1941.



Fig. II Teaching aid from the course *Vorbereitendes Zeichnen* with the theme “line surface,” Hermann Eidenbenz, *Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel*, 1943.



Fig. 12 Installation view of the section “Chemigraphen und Graphikzeichner,” exhibition of student work, anonymous (photographer), Werner Koch (teacher), Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel, 1941.

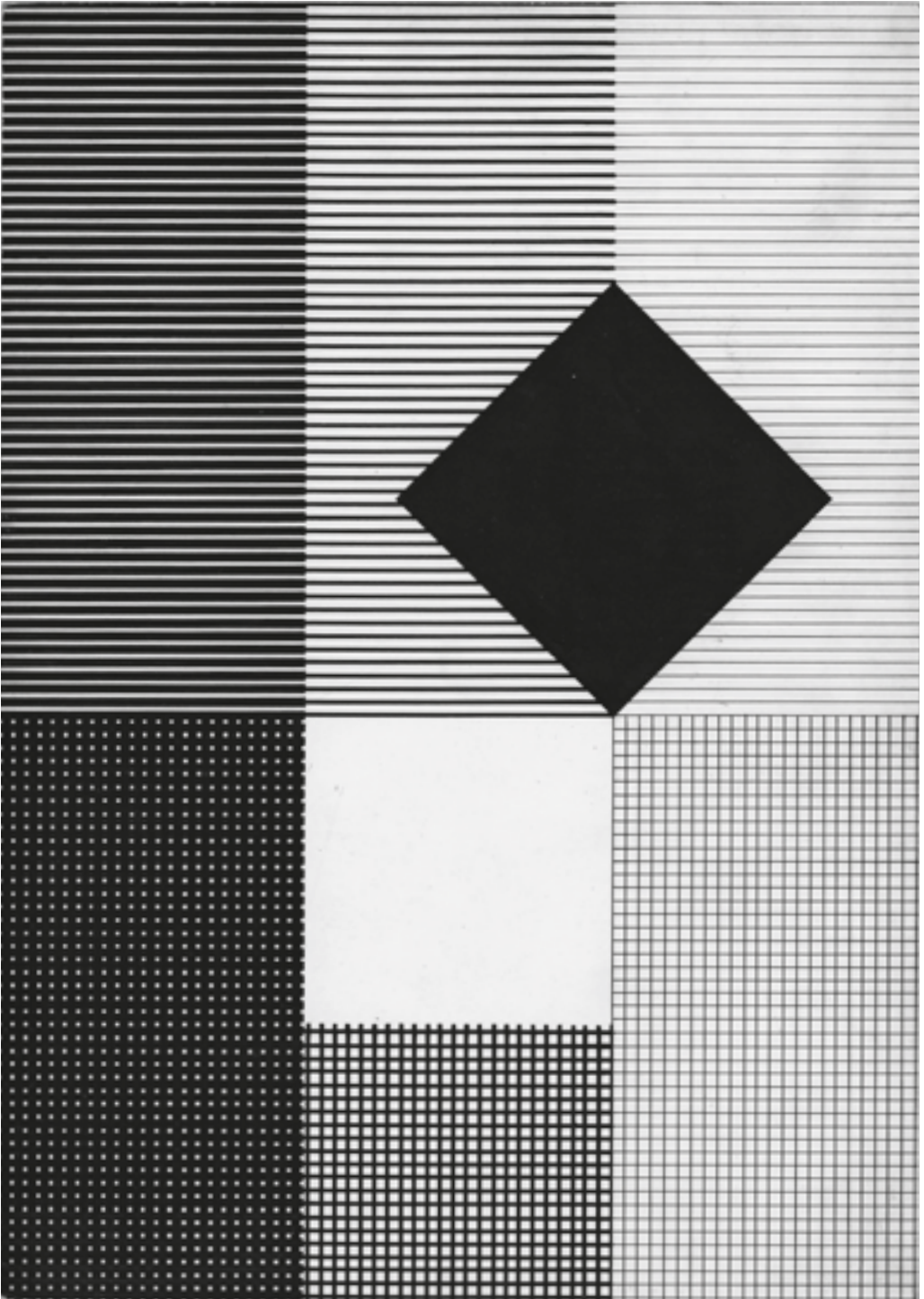


Fig. 13 Template for basic exercise, Ernst Keiser, Fachklasse für angewandte Graphik, Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel, before 1939.





Fig. 14 Installation view of the “Lithographie,” exhibition of student work, anonymous (photographer), Werner Koch (teacher), Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel, 1941.



Fig. 15 Student work from the lithography course, Marta Hirschmann (student), Werner Koch (teacher), Fachklasse für angewandte Graphik, Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel, before 1941.



Fig. 16 *Kern Reisszeuge*, student work from the lithography course, anonymous (student), Werner Koch (teacher), Fachklasse für angewandte Graphik, Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel, 1941.





Fig. 17 Installation view of the “Fotografie,” section, exhibition of student work, anonymous (photographer), Theo Ballmer (teacher), Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel, 1941.



Fig. 18 *Tierbilder durch Wort und Skizzen erläutert*, student work from photography course, Heiri Strub (student), Theo Ballmer (teacher), Fachklasse für angewandte Graphik, Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel, 1940.



Fig. 19 Installation view of the “Schrift” section and the “Signet, Zeichen” table, exhibition of student work, anonymous (photographer), Theo Ballmer (teacher), Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel, 1941.

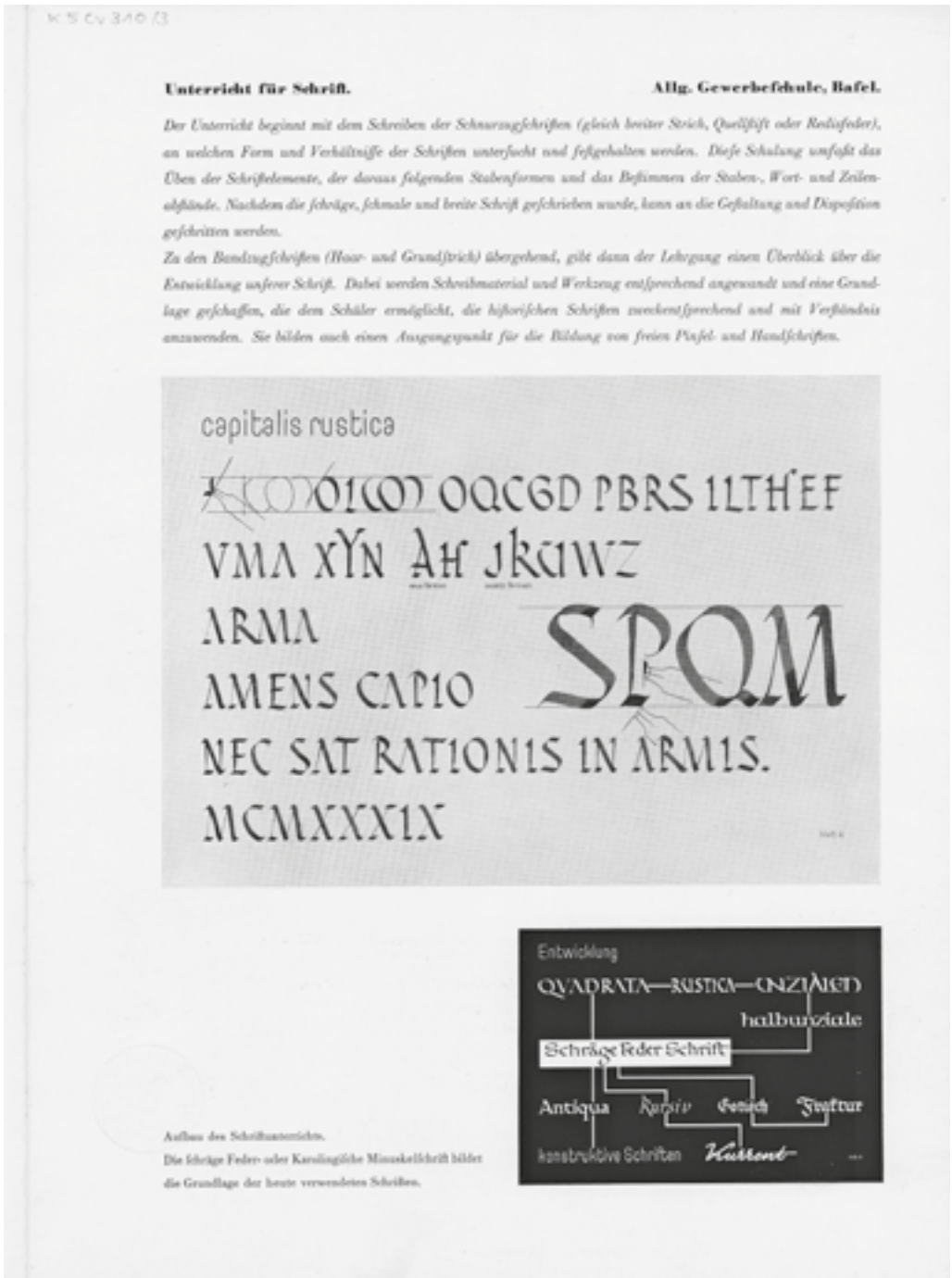


Fig. 20 Spread from the brochure *Unterricht für Schrift* (lettering course) including a timeline of letterforms (bottom right), Theo Ballmer, Fachklasse für angewandte Graphik, Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel, 1939.