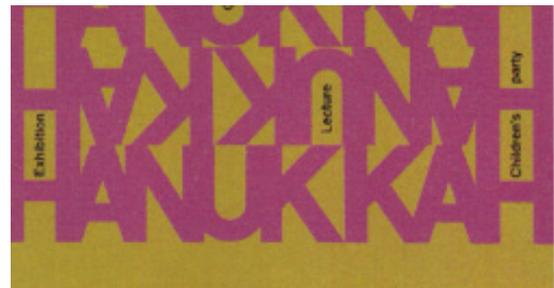
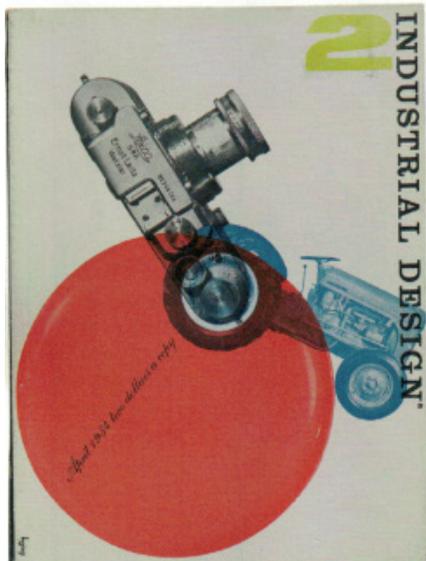




In Perspective: Art-world news and market updates, exhibitions and events  
*Lustig For Life*

Alvin Lustig is one of the key figures in graphic design. The looks he created for book and record album covers, typography, textiles, and interiors are mid-century modern classics, although the man himself has not been widely known to the general public. In fact, his name has long been a sort of secret password among design nerds. That situation is changing, however, due to recent books and exhibitions. Currently the Los Angeles County Museum of Art is mounting a show dedicated to the L.A.-based designer and his wife and collaborator Elaine Lustig Cohen, who carried on his work after he died of diabetes at the age of 40 in 1955. "The Vitality of New Forms: Designs by Alvin Lustig and Elaine Lustig Cohen" (through July 4) showcases examples spanning Lustig's entire career, as well as Cohen's own work from the 1950s and '60s.

Alvin Lustig's style was built on a foundation of geometric and color abstraction; he favored bold fields of flat color, photo-collage, typography scattered across the design in unconventional ways, and a general aura of restraint or discreetness. His book covers for New Directions Press managed to convey the content without being literal; published James Laughlin recalled, "His method was to read a text and get the feel of the author's creative drive, then to restate it in his own graphic terms." Lustig covers for Meridian Books, a series of nonfiction reprints, reached a level of abstraction that was like a book-published version of Color Field painting.



It is a testament to the keenness of Lustig's inner vision and the sheer power of his design skills that he was able to execute this commission after his illness had robbed him of his sight.

After Lustig's death, Cohen continued his contracts by adhering closely to his style, but during the '60s, she flowered as a designer in her own right, creating graphics that were bolder, zingier, and more Pop-infected than her husband's.

Many of these are on view in the exhibition. In 1973, Cohen founded Ex Libris, a shop that sold rare books and ephemera and that had a major impact on the American design scene. In 2013, she and her daughter donated 225 examples of Lustig's work and about 50 of Cohen's to LACMA, making this show possible and also helping establish the museum's new graphic design department.

"Vitality of New Forms" is installed within the modern art galleries at LACMA, where the couple's designs can be seen in close proximity to paintings by artists such as Joan Miro who inspired them. Staci Steinberg, assistant curator of decorative arts, says, "We thought that the perfect show for our modern art galleries would be Alvin Lustig and Elaine Lustig Cohen, both in dialogue with modern art. He really thought through the ideas of modern art and believed that what were private symbols for artists could be public symbols for designers." In addition to his graphic work, Lustig was an eloquent writer who argues that design should fit the realities of modern life. The title of the exhibition, in fact, is a phrase from one of his essays, *Personal Notes on Design*. Steinberg says, "The in-joke among the staff preparing the exhibition was that he practically writes his own wall labels."

