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## Bringing Design to Life: Three-Dimensional Graphic Design

Cydnee E. Jones  
*Georgia Southern University*

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*Bringing Design to Life: Three-Dimensional Graphic Design*

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in  
the Betty Foy Sanders Department of Art.

By  
Cydnee Jones

Under the mentorship of Edward Rushton

ABSTRACT

For most people, graphic design is seen as a two-dimensional medium. I have challenged this preconception by creating a design that incorporates both two-dimensional and three-dimensional elements. The secondary purpose of this work is to highlight the importance of environmental sustainability, by both the use of sustainably sourced materials and by the choice of recycling as the topic of the design. The design was created with scavenged cardboard and utilizes photography and digital design techniques.

Thesis Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_

Professor Edward Rushton

Honors Director: \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Steven Engel

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University Honors Program  
**Georgia Southern University**

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In the world of graphic design, many designers focus on two-dimensional solutions to design problems, which can place a limit on creativity and effective problem solving. As a designer, one's goal is always to find innovative ways to approach design, in order to prevent stagnation. In my personal life, I have taken a strong interest in sustainability and recycling, which is something I wish to incorporate into my design aesthetic. This, combined with my desire to break away from purely two-dimensional art, was the basis for my capstone project. My goal was to create a design that informed the viewer about the need for sustainability, used reclaimed materials as the medium, and utilized three-dimensional forms.

The first portion of the design process was a search for inspiration. A source that proved particularly useful was *Three D – Graphic Spaces*, which included selections of design work of various techniques. A few designers in particular used cardboard as a medium, which intrigued me (43, 50). I also found myself drawn to pieces that were highly typographic in nature (154-155, 168). In January of 2014, I visited the Center for Art and Theatre, where I viewed Bob Snead's installation, *Means of Production* ("Family Dollar General Tree"). Many of the works in this exhibition are created from reclaimed materials, particularly cardboard. While Snead's work explores a theme other than recycling, I found the aesthetic of his work inspirational.

Using these references as example, I began my brainstorming process, which proceeded through sketching and conversations with my faculty mentor (Fig. 1). I eventually decided that I wanted to make my project focus on three-dimensional typography and recycled materials. Initially, I wanted to create clear plastic letters that could be filled with solid waste. However, I wanted to avoid using new materials, opting

instead to use reclaimed waste as my medium. At this stage of the project, I created a prototype letter out of paperboard, which is commonly used for cereal and soda boxes. I ended up choosing cardboard instead because of its durability and prevalence, as well as its relative ease of use as a construction material. All of the cardboard used was salvaged from local businesses. I also had to test multiple types of glue with the cardboard, in order to find out which one would be the sturdiest. Hot glue proved to be the most effective, so it was used in the final construction. Since the project was heavily typographic, I had to make a decision about an appropriate typeface. Sans serif fonts were the most obvious choice, because their forms are less complex and lend themselves better to being built into three-dimensional objects. My final choice was Gill Sans MT Bold, since its letterforms are sans serif and have a clean aesthetic.

The last step before building the letters was the decision of what message to communicate. I reviewed multiple articles related to recycling to see what terminologies were most often used in the subject. “Reduce,” “reuse,” and “recycle” were used frequently, but I chose to avoid these words because of their clichéd nature. I ended up resorting to a synonym search to find terms related to recycling, and chose the word “recover” for its varied meanings. “Recover” can be used in the context of salvaging recyclables, but it can also relate to the healing of our planet through sustainable methods. I was finally ready to undertake the actual creation of the design.

I printed my letters at twelve inches tall, which was enough to give them presence without being too difficult to assemble. Being too small would have also created problems, owing to the tight curves of certain letters. The letters and their reverse images were traced onto cardboard panels and cut using a box cutter. The sides were cut at a

thickness of three and one-eighth inches, which was close to the stroke width of the letter faces. For any letter that had curves, the corrugation of the sides had to be broken down to enable flexibility. Finally, the sides and faces of the letters were carefully glued together, with an attempt to prevent any visible glue marks (Fig. 2). I arbitrarily chose my cardboard to allow any original printing or tape to show, as long as the material was not overly damaged. This was done in order to remind the viewer of the origins of the materials and of the work's status as a recycled product.

The final stage in the design process was to photograph the letterforms and create a poster that highlighted their use as a graphic design element (Fig. 3). I set the letters up in various locations on Sweetheart Circle, in order to take advantage of the existing vegetation. I took the photos from a variety of vantage points to create different perspectives, but finally chose a ground-level shot that created an illusion of height on the letters. This shot also provided a macro view of the natural debris on the ground, which helped to make a connection between the cardboard and its ecological origins. The chosen photograph was made into a tabloid-sized horizontal poster (eleven by seventeen inches), with the photo filling the bounds of the poster. I then added a translucent callout box, which is where I placed my accompanying text. I researched general data about the benefits of recycling to find information that would be concise enough for casual readers, but that would also prove interesting. Multiple sources spoke of the energy saved by recycling versus creation of goods from virgin materials, which I felt was an important advantage of recycling ("Communicating the Benefits of Recycling"). Along with paraphrasing this information, I reiterated the term "recover" to create a link between the text and the image.

At this point, the project had come full circle. I was able to create a three-dimensional design, but present it to viewers in a two-dimensional context, which is necessary for ease of dissemination. At the same time, the original work can be placed in a variety of environments, which allows viewers to interpret it in a number of contexts. Seeing the work installed in a forest would spur a different response than viewing it in a building or urban setting. In this way, an entire run of posters could be created to provide these various contexts to a larger audience. My goal of sustainability was also achieved during the project. The use of reclaimed, recyclable materials allowed me to recycle any waste created during the construction process, and the entire finished work, including printed posters, could be recycled if desired. In the end, my exploration into an unconventional medium enabled me to discover a unique design technique that I will be able to apply to future design endeavors, while allowing me to express support for a meaningful social movement.

Works Cited

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Appendix

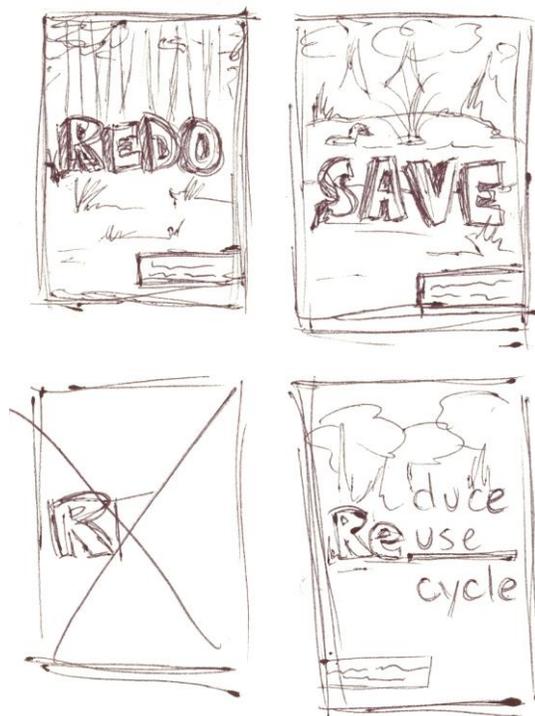


Fig. 1. *Capstone sketches*. Drawings by author. Spring 2014.



Fig. 2. *Detail of RECOVER*. Sculpture by author. Spring 2014.



Fig. 3. *RECOVER*. Poster by author. Spring 2014.