

ARIANE SPANIER

IN BERLIN, SOMEWHERE BETWEEN ART AND BUSINESS

by Ellen Shapiro

In her world, type does magical things. It splits into a million fragments. It lights up like neon. It peels open, revealing something very different underneath. It spills over from a book's cover to the edges of its pages. It's drawn by hand in pencil or it's mechanical, geometric, architectural. In animations, it organically morphs into new forms.

"I am an illustrator, but I don't draw pictures," Ariane Spanier explains in almost-perfect English lightly accented with German inflections.

She lives and works with Norwegian-born artist Björn Hegardt and their three-year-old twin daughters in the Berlin neighborhood of Kreuzberg. There, she and two design assistants serve an international client list that focuses on what she calls the cultural sector: museums, galleries, architects, artists, curators. And she and Hegardt—she is the art director, he, the editor—publish an annual 136-page artist's book/magazine of contemporary drawing entitled *FUKT*.

In other *CA* profiles, say, that of an illustrator in New Mexico or Colorado, the writer might open with a description of what it's like to share a beer with the artist on the porch as the sun sets behind the mountains. Skype gives new meaning to time-traveling for the sake of journalism. There's no

going through security, of course, and from my comfortable desktop I get a 360-degree tour of Spanier's studio, one of many in an 1890s warehouse complex that's been converted into artists' lofts. In an open space filled with books and craft materials, design assistant Stephie Becker and intern Mareike Bode look up from their screens just long enough to wave to the laptop Spanier is carrying around.

The laptop and Skype, alas, do not take me outside the building to tour Kreuzberg, which Spanier describes as "an old workers' neighborhood, now in gentrification mode, where in every second backyard you have a design studio or an immigrant family. It's full of former Turkish guest workers and their now second-generation family members and Turkish food; lively, with loads of restaurants and clubs in weird places," she says, adding that it was a hot spot for artists even before the Berlin Wall came down, and "as it gets more famous and expensive, it's still attractive to thinking, creative people."

Spanier was eleven years old in 1989 when the Wall came down, opening up her birthplace, Weimar, in the former East Germany, to the influences of the West. Growing up in the East was not as bleak or isolated as it's depicted in films

Captions were supplied by Ariane Spanier Design, the design firm responsible for all projects shown.

Right: "Illustration for a publication titled *Extra: Encyclopaedia of Experimental Print Finishing*. Thirty international designers were invited to design pages in the book to illustrate available print finishing techniques with real examples, giving information on production and costs. My contribution shows the use of a stamped hologram." Rimini Berlin, client.



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and novels, she maintains. “Weimar carried the huge cultural weight of its many Romantic writers. It was where the Bauhaus was born and it’s full of Bauhaus architecture.” On the other hand, Spanier says, “There was also a concentration camp just outside the city. So it is a place of many contradictions.”

Amid these contradictions—Goethe, Schiller and Buchenwald—Spanier grew up in a family of artists, sometimes questioning whether the artistic life was for her. Her father was an industrial designer who created precision timepieces. Her mother was an art historian, and her uncle a sculptor. “When I graduated from high school, I was really unsure of what I wanted to be,” she admits. “Maybe a vet or a researcher.” She ended up getting an internship at a Leipzig film studio, which led her to Weissensee Kunsthochschule Berlin, a multi-disciplinary, Bauhaus-inspired art academy, and its five-year master’s-s-equivalent program in visual communications. “The first year felt free and open,” she recalls. “We did drawing, color, painting, sculpture. I was in anatomy class drawing skeletons surrounded by students who were doing everything from stage design and fashion to urban planning.”

Then she got started on visual communications projects and has never stopped designing. In school, she worked hard to get experience on “projects that were really produced,” like catalogs for student exhibitions and workshops. After five years she was “really ready for the real world,” and was accepted for a three-month internship at Sagmeister Inc. in New York. It was there, she says, having been given the creative reins to design three-dimensional typographical images for one of Stefan Sagmeister’s famous maxims, “Material luxuries are best enjoyed in small doses,” that she learned work can be fun. The images she conceptualized and produced were for a tabloid-size invitation to a runway show for Sagmeister’s then-girlfriend, fashion designer Anni Kuan. The project involved crafting the word “luxuries” out of vermicelli and the word “small” from laundry hung on clotheslines on the roof of a building across the street from Sagmeister’s 14th Street studio, and art directing the photography. The project later became the first piece in Sagmeister’s collection of booklets *Things I Have Learned in My Life*. “Stefan helped me see that even hard work does not have to be all serious,” Spanier asserts.

Ready to strike out artistically on her own after the internship ended, but admittedly scared to open a studio in New York—“at least I was no longer terrified of picking up the phone”—Spanier returned to Germany and started her own practice with one client, the conceptual artist and sculptor Karin Sander, for whom she designed a witty exhibition poster and CD packaging. Building her practice from there—Ariane Spanier Design was founded in 2005—she has taken



© Björn Hegardt

the Sagmeister influence in new directions. What she clearly has in common with her one-time mentor is a total unwillingness to compromise by taking an easy way out. Her work is characterized by complexity and innovation. Every piece has an element of craft: the headline is either written by hand, or if the type is set on a computer, a hand is taken to it and it is cut and pasted, manipulated, set in motion. “Here, we love to get away from our computers,” she says, “to do something with our hands and then to figure out how to photograph or film it.”

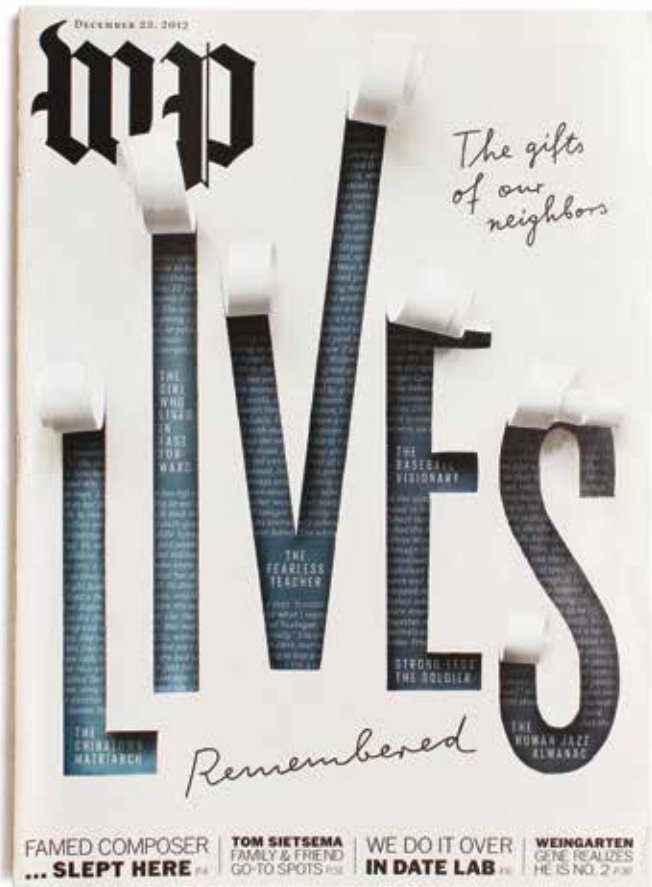
A fine example of that is a series of three posters for The Big Draw Berlin 2012, an art festival that took place in galleries, museums, parks and the streets. The lead shavings from colored pencils, then the pencils themselves, form the letters in the poster images in three stages from blurred to sharp. The entire process was captured in a 14-second promotional video. “Making these was messy, dirty,” Spanier says. “The studio was covered in colored pencil dust.”

In her world, it seems, the line between graphic designer and artist blurs and overlaps more than it does in the United States. She and Hegardt don’t feel chained to a desk, but can enjoy lives somewhere in between art and business that might include a quick trip to Paris or spending a whole summer as artists-in-residence in Norway or Iceland or Tenerife, Canary Islands. Their base in central Europe affords easy access to other countries, other cultures. “It’s a two-hour plane ride from Berlin to many countries,” she points out. “And each country is very unique and has its own style of living.” And its own opportunities for designers to connect with clients.

Some of the studio’s more interesting projects are for clients in France, Poland, Sweden, Norway, the United Kingdom and India. As just a few examples: the logo and collateral



Right: “Posters for the 3rd edition of interactive drawing festival **The Big Draw Berlin**. Responding to the concept of ‘Drawing Space,’ we produced a series of three posters in which colored pencils are making their way to forming the title of the festival. They were all shaved down in a loud and dusty process.” Ariane Spanier, art director; Maria Nogueira, designer; Kulturlabor Trial & Error e.V., client.



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for Insert 2014, a symposium about art, politics and social issues in India to be held at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in New Delhi; promotional materials for Brodno Sculpture Park in Warsaw; and the logotype and packaging for RootFood, a Swedish company that makes Asian-style entrees from organic Scandinavian ingredients. Projects for clients in Germany range from the identity, posters, flyers and tickets for a Bach music festival to a huge, comprehensive branding program for Kieler Woche 2012, the world's biggest annual sailing regatta and festival. After Spanier won the festival's poster competition, Kieler Woche commissioned her to design everything from large-scale outdoor signage to beach towels and uniforms.

In and around her client commissions, Spanier makes *FUKT* the focal point of her work. It is the kind of magazine that doesn't appear on newsstands but is launched at art book stores and international artists' book fairs, its name sometimes raising a few eyebrows at places like the New York Art Book Fair at MOMA PS1, where Spanier and Hegardt travel each year to meet their contributors and fans. "Fukt is a Swedish word meaning humidity, something that is moist," Spanier explains. "People in New York ask if we know if the word is spelled wrong, or they wink at us and say things like, 'This can have some other meaning, you know?'" Björn and I are kind and polite and explain to them that of course we do but the title was chosen for our magazine-shaped exhibition because humidity and moisture are the opposite of dry drawing materials and we think it's a more memorable title than something like 'pen and paper' or 'the line.'" Now in its tenth year, *FUKT* is published annually in an edition of 3,000 copies for a growing audience of artists and connoisseurs of contemporary works on paper.

How does raising three-year-old twin daughters fit into all this work and travel? "There is support for parents



Left: "Cover and opener illustration for *Washington Post Magazine*. The cover story, 'Lives Remembered,' told six touching life stories of people who had passed away in 2012 in the Washington area. Underneath the rolled-up title letters, glimpses of their stories are visible." Beth Broadwater, art director; Washington Post Magazine, client.

"Poster series promoting a lecture program by internationally renowned architects and firms including Atelier Oslo, Barragán, Sou Fujimoto, Lund Hagem, Herreros, Carl-Viggo Hølmekbakk, Jürgen Johner, Farshid Moussavi and Snøhetta at Dokkhuset, Trondheim. Organized by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology." NTNU Trondheim, client.

This page: "Catalog, posters and invitations for the exhibition *Dritte Welle: Die Gruppe spur, der Pop und die Politik* at Kunsthalle Kiel, Germany. The exhibition presented works of the artist group *spur* which existed for a brief period between 1957 and 1965. Working in the context of postwar Germany, the group addressed sociopolitical questions, produced manifestos and promoted their self-concept as 'the third wave' in the tradition of Dada, Futurism and Surrealism. The cover has four circular cut-outs, through which the four artists' portraits are visible." Ariane Spanier, art director; Stephanie Becker, designer; Kunsthalle zu Kiel, Germany, client.



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and kids here,” says Spanier, describing another advantage of European life. “Day care and nursery school are great and inexpensive.” The way things are set up now, she says, “The girls see what I do, experience our kind of life and sit with me and draw, cut paper and glue.” Spanier’s two assistants make it all work, too. Stephie Becker, a graduate of Lette-Verein Berlin, a vocational school that specializes in design and technology, came to Ariane Spanier Design after six years as art director for the International Design Festival in Berlin. Mareike Bode graduated in 2012 from the Royal Academy of Arts, The Hague, Netherlands. “We learn from each other a lot,” says Spanier of her little team. “It’s good to work in an environment where you have the same level of thinking and, although you may not have the same native language, understand each other.” This approach has brought many rewards, including having work featured in the New York Type Directors Club annuals and international poster exhibitions in Russia, Austria and China.

And in the future? “In a few years,” she muses, “we might have to move. As the kids get older we will probably need to divide the living space from the studio.” But that’s in the future, and what’s happening right now is much more important. It means getting back to work on *FUKT*’s next issue, which focuses on contemporary animation themes and techniques, and planning trips to upcoming art book fairs in London, New York and, for the first time, Los Angeles.

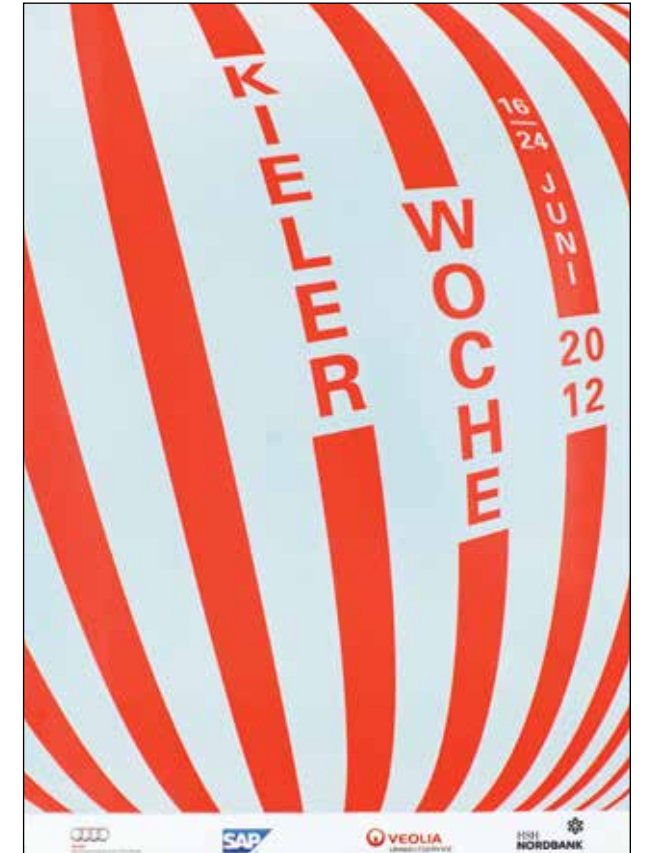
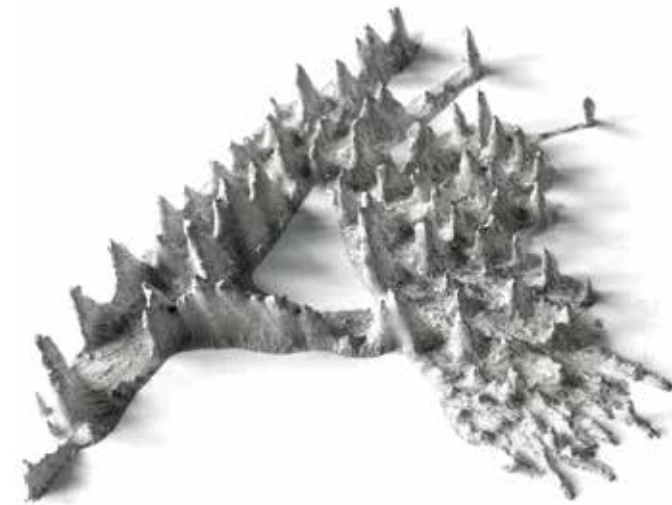
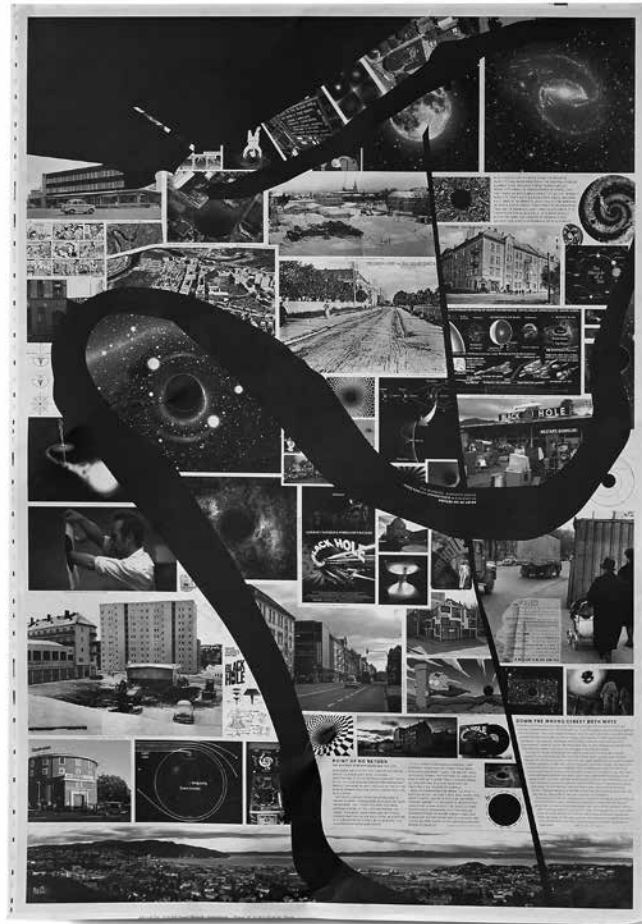
“The most important thing in life is to enjoy the work,” Spanier affirms. “Have fun with it. That is what the audience sees. Sometimes this business is hard and stressful, but if you have fun, then design works and it’s good for everyone.” [ca](#)

This page: “A double-sided poster accompanying a 3-D art installation by Swedish artists Björn Hegardt and Theo Ågren at Rake project space, in Trondheim, Norway. Optical illusions, interiors, black holes and white light as well as a play with gravity are main subjects of their work.” Ågren & Hegardt, client.

Right: “Design of a magnetic-ink alphabet and layout templates for the online writing application **Notegraphy**. Registered users can write a note, style it with a design of their choice and publish their message on social networks.” Notegraphy, client.

“Poster and corporate design for the world’s biggest annual **sailing regatta and festival**, Kieler Woche, in Kiel, Germany. Every year the poster’s motif is selected from proposals through a juried competition. The inspiration was a spinnaker, a large, round and often colorful sail that is used to augment a boat’s sail surface. Printed in fluorescent color.” City of Kiel, Germany, client.

Outside everything is immeasurable and *For we are where we are not*. “Design of two matching catalogs for Norwegian artist Nina Torp in different paper formats and materials.” Ariane Spanier, art director; Stephie Becker, designer; Nina Torp, client.



This page: “During the Year of Architecture in Norway in 2011, an **architecture festival** was held in Oslo with exhibitions, installations and parties. The brochure served as a program, printed on newsprint.” 0047/NAL, clients.

“**Artist book** for a project by Ivanoska & Calovski about a proposal by the Finnish/Polish architect Oskar Hansen for a museum in Skopje, Macedonia, that was never realized. A hypothetical approach toward the museum’s existence and its program.” Yane Calovski/Gallery Kronika/Hristina Ivanoska, clients.

Right: “Ongoing editorial design for **FUKT**, a magazine for contemporary drawing. The magazine showcases the work of international artists working in the field of drawing. Design and format of the annual publication changes with each issue.” FUKT magazine, client.

