

Phil Baines, graphic designer and teacher
(8 December 1958– 19 January 2024)

As news of the death of Phil Baines has circulated, the sense of collective loss throughout international design and lettering communities has been profound. The shock is all the greater as the news so closely followed *Extol*, his recent retrospective exhibition, which had served to refocus attention on the vitality of his practice.

Phil was a graphic designer and a teacher. Known for his typography, he avoided describing himself as a typographer. He felt that it was too isolationist, focusing only on the design of text, when the relationship of the text to everything else was just as important. It was this understanding of how typography worked in context that enabled him to take on such a diverse range of projects, including books for leading publishers, posters and art catalogues for cultural institutions, identity and wayfinding systems including for Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft, as well as typefaces, and lettering for three London monuments.

To each of these different design spaces Phil brought his individual approach, forged from a combination of historical understanding, material insight and an exploratory process that remained anchored in language and the expressive potential of the form of words. The outcomes could be restrained and resonant, as are the inscriptions for the 7 July 2005 Memorial in Hyde Park, developed in collaboration with architects Carmody Groarke. Or they might be joyful, as with his book covers for the Penguin ‘Great Ideas’ series. But his work found its fullest expression in self-initiated and often self-authored works where he had the greatest freedom to experiment. Some of this work, including projects from his student years, featured in the ground-breaking survey of contemporary typographic design *Typography now* (1991), helping to establish early on his reputation as a singular and influential voice.

Phil was born in Kendal, Westmorland, and took a circuitous route to art college, studying at Ushaw College in Durham for the Roman Catholic priesthood before switching to graphic design. From 1982 to 1985 he studied at St Martin’s School of Art, London. After graduating with an MA from the Royal College of Art in 1987 he started his own graphic design business, and the following year began teaching at Central Saint Martins, where he was awarded a professorship in 2006. His passion for typography was infectious in a way that opened out the field for students. Known for his red pen and exacting attention to detail, he was much loved for his attention to people, always respectful of students as owners of their own creative vision.

His enthusiasm for sharing knowledge extended beyond the classroom. He wrote books that added to our understanding of visual communication, including *Type & Typography* (with Andrew Haslam), *Signs: Lettering in the Environment* (with Catherine Dixon) and *Penguin by Design: A Cover Story 1935-2005*. In 2016, he was appointed to the Royal Mint Advisory Committee on the Design of Coins. Medals. Seals and Decorations.

Phil took early retirement from CSM in 2020 following a diagnosis of Ataxia, which was later qualified as Multiple System Atrophy (MSA). It is an immense relief that the *Extol* show happened when it did. Phil had the opportunity to recognise for himself the scope of his

achievement and to know just how much he was loved by so many. He is survived by his father Martin, and by his wife Jackie, and their two daughters Beth and Felicity.

Phil is featured on the BBC Radio 4 show *Last Word* (2 February 2024), available via BBC Sounds.