



**Letter from AIGA president,
Clement Mok**

Greetings:

It doesn't seem all that long ago that I first became a member of AIGA. It was 1980 and I had just graduated from Art Center and moved to New York City to work. I attended an AIGA gathering honoring that year's medallist Herb Lubalin, a celebration held in a meeting hall near Wall Street that was decked with Rembrandt-esque banker's portraits. The attendees were dressed in 50 shades of designer black. Maybe it was the cocktails, the slide show, the speeches, or the good-natured toasts by Lubalin's friends, but I remember leaving the event wanting to be part of this community that cared about its craft, supported each other's challenges and celebrated each other's accomplishments. I knew then, as I do now, that I made the right choice.

Over the years, through good economic times as well as bad, AIGA has always provided me with guidance and knowledge on being a better practitioner. Conferences, competitions, publications and seminars have provided a sense of continuity with the past and a source of inspiration for things to come. AIGA has introduced me to people who also share a life-long passion about the history, craft and role design plays in shaping the world around us.

As I begin to think about the responsibilities and the role of AIGA, the following questions seem most important. Where is the design profession going and what should we be doing to prepare ourselves to be valuable contributors? With the economic downturn, what are the issues and priorities we must focus on? What things give value and meaning to membership

now and in the future? Why isn't our membership larger? How do we continue to nurture, inspire and instigate intelligent discourse on design? Where are our blind spots? What initiatives must we champion? More importantly, how do we bring forward the great and meaningful aspects of design so they lend relevance to the present and carve a place for us in the future?

Having served on the national board twice in the last 20+ years of my career, these questions are not new to me. They do, however, take on different meaning and priority with every economic, social and/or technological change. These changes continually alter what we design and how we practice and create designs. Every two or three years we revisit and question the direction of our profession with a new president. It is with this perspective I will engage, listen to and to serve the AIGA community.

How are we doing?

As a community of practitioners, we are more diverse in our backgrounds, training, practice and age. There are more design practitioners in more fields of design in more locales doing agenda-setting work than there have ever been in the history of American graphic design. As our numbers grow, we become a voice to be listened to. Design is no longer a craft practiced by the elite for the elite. Our work is recognized as a part of the mainstream culture. Our voices, however, are fragmented and often contradictory, and despite our size and numbers and our role in bringing ideas to life, we have not been able to leverage our collective insights and wisdom.

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www.AIGA.org

By Clement Mok

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We have made great strides since my first tenure on the board. AIGA has been transformed dramatically under Ric Grefé's leadership: it is an efficient operation admired by other professions; we have developed new ways to communicate among members and to the public; programming, professional practices and alliances have been addressed in a strategic way; and the institution is financially sound. From this position of strength, we can build and strengthen our profession. What can we do to make sure we continue to learn from each other and make ourselves better practitioners?

Driven in part by the economy and technological changes, the design profession has gone through multiple major transformations in recent decades. In the late 1980s, desktop publishing caused great anxiety for printers, typographers and designers alike. For many, it's difficult to even recall a time when type was reviewed in galleys from a typesetting house. Most recently, the Internet has forced many designers to correspond, present and/or deliver work electronically. Our sphere of design influence is no longer limited by time and distance. Communication among our peers--whether in Lincoln, Nebraska or midtown Manhattan--is just seconds and clicks away. The implications all these factors have on our practice are just beginning to be played out.

Context, tools and direction

In order to shape future changes, we have to recognize that the world of design is infinitely more complex than it used to be. Clients, designers, users and viewers are all playing new roles. The boundaries of these roles and what's considered design are blurred. Anyone with a computer and graphics software can label themselves a designer and they do. The burden is now placed on seasoned, trained designers to demonstrate the ideals of our profession. In our unique and special ways, we manage to fumble our way through this with mixed successes.

The channels through which communications are delivered are fragmented and varied. Solutions are often a buffet of infinite choices. More often than not, figuring out which design problem to solve is much harder and more time consuming. Raw talent alone is not enough to ensure a designer's ability to practice his or her craft. Designers now need to have street smarts and business savvy in order to be more than a pair of hands. We tend to focus our attention on the problem at hand rather than what could be. It's time to harness the passion, vigor, knowledge and commitment of this incredible community of designers.

Being the change-junkie that I am, I will instigate, cajole, challenge and engage this community in a dialogue that will move forward in defining a future for us. I will look into strengthening our programs and support in the professional practices area—education outreach and mentorship, partnerships, and alliances with allied professions and organizations; but also standard contracts, intellectual property agreements, compensation models, legal advocacy and training. Lastly, I hope to continue shaping AIGA into the place where stimulating and inspiring thinking about design occurs.

My career to date has been a dress rehearsal for this new role as AIGA president. I expect to wear many hats and play many roles. There will be decisions with which you will agree and disagree. I trust that you will let me know and provide constructive suggestions on how to make the experience and the value of being a member better.

I encourage you to give these statements some thought and send me suggestions. I will work with the board, chapter leadership executive director Ric Grefé, and the ever-capable national staff to make sure AIGA is an institution that help to remember our past, bring relevance to the present, and shape our future.

Clement Mok
President