AN ICON YOU SHOULD KNOW...

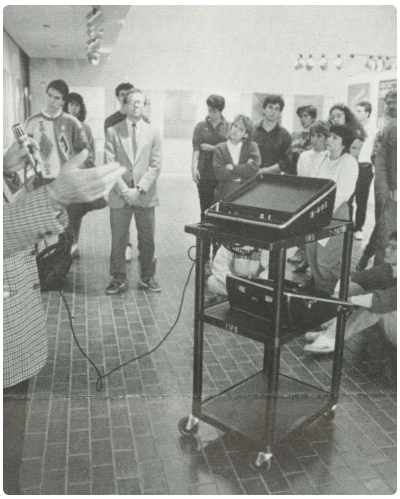
Josef Müller-Brockmann

Swiss graphic designer, author and teacher, 1914 to 1996

Josef Müller-Brockmann was a Swiss designer and a pioneer of the International Typographic Style, often called Swiss Style. He worked with grids, geometric shapes and clean sans serif type instead of illustration. He also taught design and wrote books about it, including a guide to grid systems. Read this page in about five minutes, then use the links at the end to look deeper.

FURTHER LOOKING

MoMA: The collection page for *Der Film*. moma.org
Cooper Hewitt: Its record for *Der Film*, with a short essay. collection.cooperhewitt.org
Fonts In Use: How the *Der Film* title type was made. fontsinuse.com
Video: Josef Müller-Brockmann Lecture at RIT



Josef Müller-Brockmann. Wikimedia Commons, public domain. Full credit on page 3.

01 Fact Sheet

1914	Born May 9 in Rapperswil, Switzerland.
Before 1936	Studies architecture, design and art history in Zurich, with teachers including Ernst Keller.
1936	Opens his own design studio in Zurich.
1943	Marries the violinist Verena Brockmann and adds her name to his.
1950	Makes his first concert poster for the Tonhalle in Zurich, the start of a long series.
1957	Starts teaching graphic design at the Zurich School of Arts and Crafts, taking over from Ernst Keller.
1958	Becomes a founding editor of the magazine *Neue Grafik* (New Graphic Design).
1961	Publishes *The Graphic Artist and His Design Problems*.
1967	Becomes a European design consultant to IBM and forms his firm, Müller-Brockmann & Co.
1981	Publishes *Grid Systems in Graphic Design*.
1996	Dies August 30.

Life and career Milestones tied to the key works

THREE KEY WORKS, PAGE 2

1960
Der Film

1961
Gestaltungsprobleme des Grafikers

1981
Grid Systems in Graphic Design

02 Three Key Works

Many of Müller-Brockmann's best-known posters use shapes and photos that are still in copyright, so they are linked under Further Looking. The three works below use only type, and they are public domain as text designs.

1960: *Der Film*

Type that moves like a film title

Müller-Brockmann made this poster for *Der Film*, an exhibition about film at the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Zurich. It has no pictures, only words. The Cooper Hewitt museum explains that by overlapping the word Film with the word der, which means the, he used type to show film montage. The museum adds that the gray letters sit in a space behind, and a time before, the white ones.

LOOK FOR Words that overlap like frames of film | Gray letters behind white ones

See the Cooper Hewitt record for this poster →



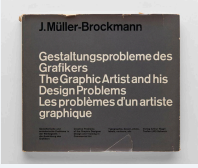
Der Film, 1960. Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

1961: *Gestaltungsprobleme des Grafikers*

One title in three languages

This book came out in 1961 from the Swiss publisher Niggli. In English it is called *The Graphic Artist and His Design Problems*. The cover uses only type. The title runs in German, English and French, one after another, set flush left in a plain sans serif. Nothing is centered, and nothing is decorated.

LOOK FOR Flush-left lines with a ragged right edge | Light type on a dark gray cover



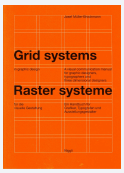
Gestaltungsprobleme des Grafikers, 1961. Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

1981: *Grid Systems in Graphic Design*

A book about grids, built on a grid

Niggli published *Grid Systems in Graphic Design* in 1981, with the German title *Raster Systeme für die visuelle Gestaltung*. Like his 1961 book, it prints two languages side by side. On the cover, thin lines divide the orange field into a grid. The English and German titles and every small block of text line up with those lines.

LOOK FOR Thin guide lines left visible | Two languages in matching blocks



Grid Systems in Graphic Design, 1981. Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

TRY THIS

Fold a sheet of paper into six equal boxes. Make a poster for a school event using only type, and line up every word with the folds. What changes when you break the grid on purpose for one word?

IMAGE POLICY Copyrighted artworks, designs and resource screenshots are linked rather than reproduced here. Where an image is omitted, follow the official source link above. Hosted third-party images are limited to the verified public-domain and openly licensed images credited on page 3.

REFLECT

Think About It

Müller-Brockmann used grids to make design feel calm and orderly. When does a strict grid help a design, and when might it get in the way?

03 Sources

WORKS CITED

Hudson, Rob. "Der Film Exhibition Poster and Catalog." *Fonts In Use*, 9 Feb. 2023, fontsinuse.com/uses/6396/der-film-exhibition-poster-and-catalog. Accessed 26 Nov. 2026.

"Josef Müller-Brockmann." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josef_M%C3%BCller-Brockmann. Accessed 26 Nov. 2026.

"Josef Müller-Brockmann Lecture at RIT." *YouTube*, uploaded by Format, www.youtube.com/watch?v=DslZT9jm6VQ. Accessed 26 Nov. 2026.

Müller-Brockmann, Josef. *Der Film*. 1960. Museum of Modern Art, New York, www.moma.org/collection/works/4882. Accessed 26 Nov. 2026.

Müller-Brockmann, Josef. *Gestaltungsprobleme des Grafikers: The Graphic Artist and His Design Problems*. Niggli, 1961.

Müller-Brockmann, Josef. *Grid Systems in Graphic Design*. Niggli, 1981.

"Poster, der Film [Film]." *Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum*, collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18673705/. Accessed 26 Nov. 2026.

Rochester Institute of Technology. *News & Events*, vol. 19, no. 5, 5 Nov. 1987. *RIT Digital Archive*, digitalarchive.rit.edu/xmlui/handle/1850/20175. Accessed 26 Nov. 2026.

IMAGE CREDITS

Rochester Institute of Technology. *Josef Müller-Brockmann Meeting with Students*. *News & Events*, 5 Nov. 1987, via Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (published in the United States without a copyright notice, tagged PD-US-1978-89 on Commons). Accessed 26 Nov. 2026.

Josef Müller-Brockmann. *Der Film*. 1960, offset lithograph poster, Museum of Modern Art, via Wikimedia Commons. Public domain as a text-only design (tagged PD-textlogo on Commons). Accessed 26 Nov. 2026. Resized for display.

Josef Müller-Brockmann. Cover of *Gestaltungsprobleme des Grafikers*. Niggli, 1961, Museum für Gestaltung Zürich, via Wikimedia Commons. Public domain as a text-only design (tagged PD-textlogo on Commons). Accessed 26 Nov. 2026.

Josef Müller-Brockmann. Cover of *Grid Systems in Graphic Design*. Niggli, 1981, via Wikimedia Commons. Public domain as a text-only design (tagged PD-textlogo on Commons). Accessed 26 Nov. 2026. Resized for display.

Process Circles. Full Color Icons. Supplied series branding asset.