

Design process: a social-issue poster

Lance Hidy was commissioned by Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament (WAND), a Massachusetts organization involved in the movement to reduce nuclear weapons, to design a poster that could be used to publicize the organization and its activities. Also, WAND planned to use the design in fund-raising by reproducing and selling it as a limited-edition silk-screen print, an offset lithographic reproduction, notecards, postcards, and T-shirts. Hidy contributed his time to WAND, carefully stipulating that it could have unlimited use of the design but it was not to make alterations, permit other organizations to use it, or

remove the artist's signature without permission.

Hidy believes that graphic design is a collaboration between designer, sponsor or client, and printer. The initial WAND poster was silk-screen printed by master printer Rob Day, with whom Hidy collaborates. The struggle to satisfy the needs and interests of the client while maintaining the integrity of personal vision is paramount in Hidy's mind. At his initial meetings with a client, Hidy listens carefully to the client's expectations, ideas, and sense of aesthetics. "I am alert for attitudes and ideas that are compatible with my own," Hidy observes, "and I steer the project in that direction." Hidy and the WAND directors agreed at their initial meeting that they wanted to avoid the frightening images of missiles, mushroom clouds, and skulls predominant in antinuclear posters. Hidy believes "terrifying images have limited effectiveness, since they cause us to go numb for awhile. We learn to become insensitive to the meaning of a mushroom cloud; otherwise, we could become disabled by our emotions!"⁷

Hidy's search for a direction became more focused after he attended WAND's Mother's Day event, where one of WAND's fundamental ideas—that nuclear disarmament is for the sake of children and future generations—heightened his appreciation of the movement. As the father of a young daughter, he had great empathy for this concept. Many of Hidy's posters are reductive, presenting only two elements: an image and the sponsor's name. However, he found it difficult to convey the complex concept "nuclear disarmament for the sake of children and future generations" within these simple parameters.

After determining that a slogan was needed to connote the image and function as a rallying cry for the movement, Hidy met with advertising copywriter Margaret Wilcox. Of the thirty ideas they generated during one all-day session, the one that seemed most promising to Hidy was, "They ask the world of you." When Hidy presented this slogan to WAND, the positive response was immediate and unanimous. Hidy sought approval to change this to "Children ask the world of us," because he felt that this version was more specific and personal.

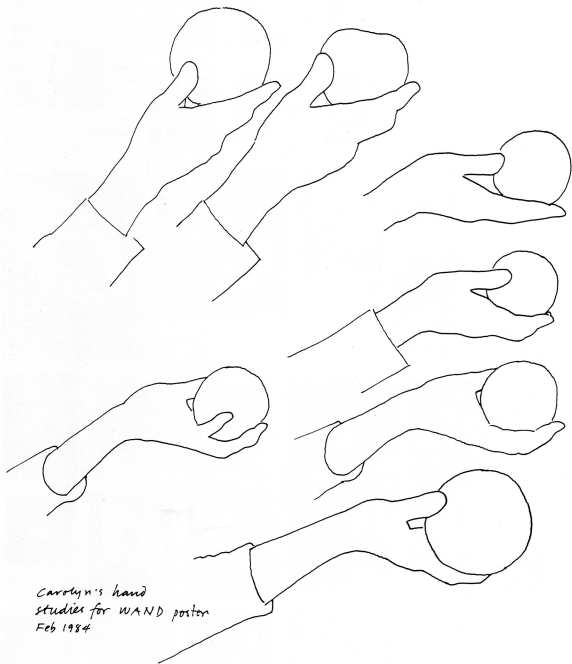
Feeling that an image of a mother and child might be appropriate, Hidy selected his neighbor Sheri Larson and her infant son David as models and shot several rolls of film. From one of the contact sheets (fig. 5-8), he selected a shot with excellent profile views and a classic maternal gesture (fig. 5-9).



5-8

Sketches were made from the photograph to develop a feeling for its form and space (fig. 5-10). The stacks of sketches Hidy had made during the brainstorming session included sketches of the earth as a toy ball. These inspired him to have the mother handing the earth to the child, an eloquent visual metaphor for the concept of passing care of the planet from generation to generation. Additional photography and sketches were made to explore the placement of the continents on the globe and the position of the mother's hand (fig. 5-11). At this point Hidy felt that he had found the solution and proceeded to the actual artwork.





Carolyn's hand
studies for WAND poster
Feb 1984



5-12



5-13



5-14



CHILDREN ASK
THE WORLD OF US

5-18



5-15



5-16



5-17



5-19



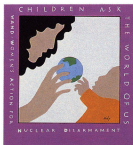
5-20



5-21



5-22



5-23



5-24



5-28



5-31



5-25



5-26



5-27



5-29



5-30



5-32



5-33



5-34



5-35



5-36



5-37



5-38



5-39

The three main problems to be resolved were drawing, color, and typography or lettering. Usually Hidy makes from five to fifteen color gouache sketches before solving a poster design problem. For the WAND poster, he made a total of sixty-three sketches, fifty-five of which are reproduced here (figs. 5-12 through 5-66). Hidy has a policy of showing only one solution at a time to a client. "This forces me to be decisive about what I want," he commented, "and it minimizes the temptation for the client to 'play artist' by picking elements from different designs and asking me to combine these." In the first series of color studies (figs. 5-12 through 5-18), Hidy worked closely from his line drawing, cropping the figures and simplifying the design into shapes of color. The shape of the mother's shoulder and arm was not satisfactory, for it seemed too dominant and distracted from the mother, child, and globe. Therefore, Hidy abandoned this series without showing it to the client, and he rethought the composition.

In the second series of studies, Hidy simplified the design by stripping away the background and focusing upon the simple silhouettes of the mother and her child, who is reaching up for the globe (figs. 5-19 through 5-24). The larger study (fig. 5-24) was presented to the client, who responded favorably except for a few minor reservations.

Hidy returned to his studio and explored this direction further (figs. 5-25 through 5-39). In the solution presented to WAND a few days later (fig. 5-36), the color was more intense, and the drawing of the mother's hand was improved. Hidy felt that this was his best shot and was upset when it was flatly rejected. The WAND board did not care for the magenta color used on the skin and feared that the moon and star might have connotations of astrological or Soviet metasympols. Unsuccessful in his attempts to dissuade them, Hidy "became very discouraged and lost my confidence." Because the deadline was near, he forced himself to continue.



5-40



5-41



5-42



5-43



5-44



5-45



5-46



5-47



5-48



5-49



5-50



5-51



5-52



5-57



5-58



5-59



5-60



5-61



5-62



5-63



5-64



5-65



5-53



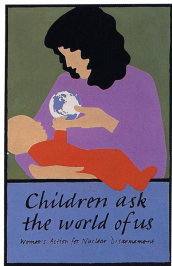
5-54



5-55



5-56



5-66

"I mechanically started doing tiny, two-inch color sketches with a natural skin tone, minus the moon and star," he recalls (figs. 5-40 through 5-56). "Those were a couple of bad days, since I felt disconnected from the design, and without inspiration. The sketches looked like garbage to me, and with the clock ticking away, I started to panic." Clearly something was bothering Hidy about the solution, and he was struggling to salvage it through the application of color.

Out of desperation, Hidy abruptly stopped making the color sketches and decided to go back to square one. Returning to his photographs, Hidy "tried to salvage the passion he had once had for the project, which was now lost." Looking again at the sketch of Sheri holding David in her arm (see fig. 5-10), Hidy began to question the rejected design, for "the mother and baby were not touching, which may have been a mistake. So I went back to having the mother hold the baby, making the image more intimate and natural" (figs. 5-57 through 5-66). The image is less tightly cropped, and both of the mother's hands are shown. This felt right. Hidy quickly regained his enthusiasm and explored two color schemes. Because he felt equally good about them, he broke "his one solution only policy" by showing both to WAND. The client couldn't decide between the two proposed color options either, so they decided to print both versions. The earth-toned palette harmonizes with many domestic interiors, and the brighter palette is more effective in public locations.

In his poster designs, Hidy favors hand-lettering over type, agreeing with British type historian Stanley Morison that typography is a department of calligraphy. The first two lettering approaches (fig. 5-67) for the WAND poster are formal capitals, with inspiration derived from the typefaces Futura, Albertus, and Neuland. Although a stately and dignified resonance is projected, Hidy finally decided to use his handwriting (fig. 5-68). The irregularity and informality of it would, Hidy hoped, have the resonance of a personal voice, rather than a distant institutional presence.

CHILDREN ASK
THE WORLD OF US.
CHILDREN ASK
THE WORLD OF US

WOMEN'S ACTION FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

5-67

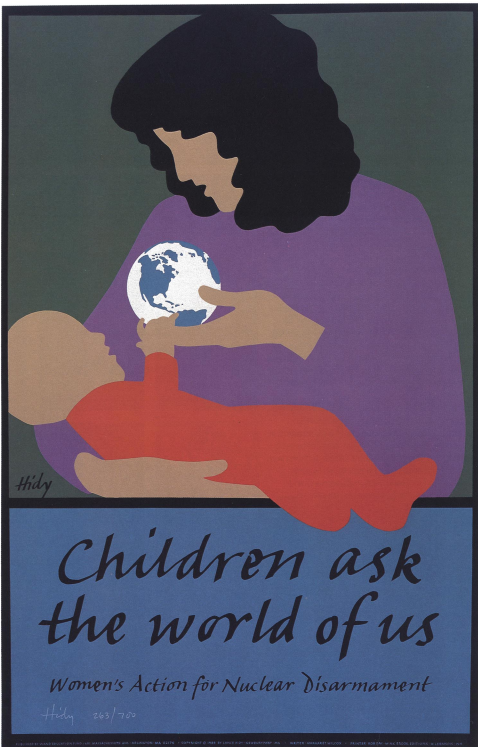
*Children ask
the world of us.
Children ask
the world of us*

← 7" x 16" →

Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament 70%
Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament
Women's Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament
Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament

← 17" x 16" →

5-68



The simplification of the image enables it to signify every woman and every child, an elemental image speaking to the issue of world peace (fig. 5-69). The rejected design with the moon and stars has been published by Anthoensen Press in Portland, Maine (fig. 5-70) and issued as a notecard by Portal Publications. These simple images have become late twentieth-century icons that speak in a gentle voice to universal aspirations. That thousands upon thousands of reproductions of Lance Hidy's "Children Ask the World of Us" graphics for the Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament have been printed and distributed comes as no surprise.



CHILDREN ASK THE WORLD OF US

5-70

Update: In 2019 Hidy decided to modify the poster for the climate crisis, and make the skin color more universal

