Book Cover Design

The three typefaces used are Bastardo Grotesk (Giulia Boggio), Cofo Sans (Contrast Type Foundry), and Fraunces (Phaedra Charles)—all created by designers who identify as women, non-binary or trans. The typography on the cover makes a loud statement with the title and subtitle in large, bold type with a spot varnish, echoing an unwavering chant of feminist protest. The addition of emoji-style glyphs on each line speak to the snarky ambivalence felt by an emerging generation of feminists. The purple hues merge the historical purple of the 20th century suffragettes, with the effervescence of so-called Gen Z lavender. In the feminist spirit of citation, the name of every contributor in the book is featured on the cover in alphabetical order, giving credit where credit is due.

Book Interior Design

The interior of the book is designed for accessible reading, plus ease of skimming; sections are short, with headlines, decks, and pull quotes like a magazine.

Book Interior Design

The purple hues are carried throughout the book, as chapter openers, tinted backgrounds and highlight colors.

Media Recognition

The book has received much positive recognition from the media, with several reviews in major outlets including the *Boston Globe*, *Metropolis Magazine*, and *Madame Architect*; and was named one of the best design books of 2023 by both *Fast Company* and the *Architect's Newspaper*.

FAST COMPANY

CO.DESIGN   TECH   WORK LIFE   NEWS   IMPACT   PODCASTS   VIDEO   INNOVATION FESTIVAL 360

12-26-23

The best design books of 2023

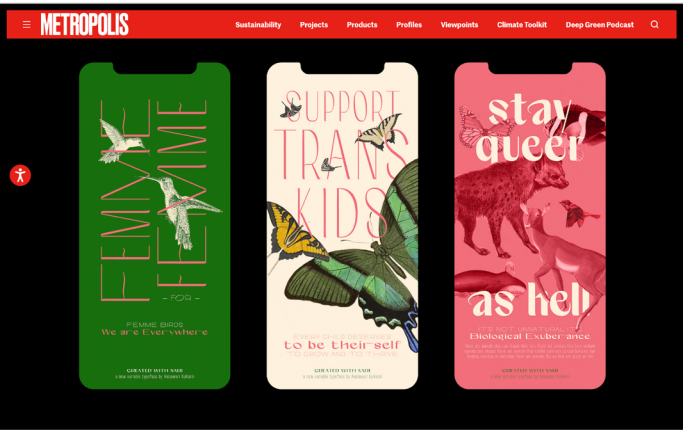7 must-read books that reckon with the current moment in design.

BY **JARRETT FULLER**   4 MINUTE READ

Design is in a moment of crisis. The dominant forms of practice, from design thinking to human-centered design, are being called into question as the pressing issues facing the planet are forcing the design industries to reconsider what they do, how they do it, and who they work with. Thankfully, there are practitioners, thinkers, academics, and historians who are tackling these challenges head on. The books I found most compelling this year were the ones that didn't shy away from the big questions. They were books that probed and questioned. They challenged my thinking and gave me new ways of seeing design, and the world. It's easy to get pessimistic but the books assembled here never take the easy way out: ultimately, they demonstrate what design is best at: imagining new futures that are better than today.

[Cover Image: MIT Press]

Feminist Designer: On the Personal and the Political in Design by **Alison Place (editor)**

METROPOLIS

Sustainability   Projects   Products   Profiles   Viewpoints   Climate Toolkit   Deep Green Podcast

Images courtesy Biodiversity Heritage Library. Design by Sheshana Schultz.

August 17, 2023

A New Book Explores the Intersection of Design and Feminist Theory

With essays and case studies from 43 contributors, *Feminist Designer* puts forth new design methods that challenge design's patriarchal origins.

By: **Jaxson Stone**

What does it mean to be a feminist? What does it mean to be a *designer*? Perhaps the definitions are not always as black-and-white as "someone who advocates for women's rights" or even "someone who designs." By embracing and expanding on the plurality of these terms, a forthcoming volume edited by Alison Place highlights the intersection of design and feminist theory while arguing for new collaborative processes that work to dismantle oppressive power structures.

Feminist Designer: On the Personal and the Political in Design Edited by Alison Place MIT Press, 2023, 264 pp., $29.95

Feminist Designer, which will be available this fall, moves beyond the concept of "inclusion" as a framework for discussing women in the design industries and instead compiles diverse contributions from over 40 transnational contributors on topics from anticapitalist branding and typography to mother-centered and trauma-informed design. Each of the six sections (titled Power, Knowledge, Care, Plurality, Liberation, and Community) contains an opening essay by Place followed by a selection of essays, conversations, and case studies that highlight not only theory but approachable methods such as notes on feminist design pedagogy or frameworks for disability design.

Claudia Marina in her contribution "On Calling Yourself a Designer" questions the boundaries of what we call "design" and *who* gets to do it. "Writing this essay, I started to question if capital-D design was inherently misogynistic, and when I asked myself that question, I found it harder to theorize that notion away," Marina explains. "This book is not a capital-D solution, but rather a compendium of one of the tenets of feminist discourse, which is recognizing difference and thinking through it."

Media Recognition: Excerpts

Excerpts published in *Design Observer* and *Fast Company.*

Design Observer

Alison Place | Books   09.05.23

On Fighting the Typatriarchy

Editor's Note: The following conversation is an excerpt from Feminist Designer: On the Personal and the Political in Design (MIT Press, 2023), and is reprinted here with permission of the publisher.

Alison Place is a designer, educator, and researcher who practices feminism through design. She is Assistant Professor of Graphic Design in the School of Art at the University of Arkansas and the author and editor of Feminist Designer. She spoke to type designer Aasawari Kulkarni about the origins of her feminist typeface, Nari, and the patriarchal underpinnings of the type design industry.

Nari Variable Specimen book.

Alison Place: What brought you to design, and what was your design education like?

Aasawari Kulkarni: I was a creative kid. Growing up in India, there were not many options for creative careers. I went to the National Institute of Fashion Technology, where I focused on different things like fashion journalism, fashion photography, and graphic design, which led me to type design. After I graduated, I worked at the Indian Type Foundry, where I designed my first Devanagari typeface called "Suhas." I knew this was something I wanted to do, but I felt like I needed more education, so I went to graduate school at the Maryland Institute College of Art. That was the first time I realized design can be about more than just selling things; it can be about cultural criticism, cultural theory, and bringing that aspect of yourself and your journey into it. It changed the way I approached design.

AP: What sparked a feminist approach to your design practice?

AK: The first time I really thought about the patriarchy is when I read *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, which was a retelling of the oldest classic mythologies from India, the Mahabharata, from the shero's perspective. It got me thinking about the nature of patriarchal storytelling in India. When I got a chance to do a project on self-inquiry during grad school, I revisited one of my favorite stories from childhood that my grandmother used to tell me, the Ramayana. It's the epic tale of the abduction of King Ram's wife, Sita, by Ravana, the demon king of Lanka. King Ram has been worshipped on a pedestal equal to God, as being the most perfect human to have walked the planet. However, I found the ending of this story later: he abandoned his wife to keep the royal throne stain free because she was kidnapped by another man. It disturbed me that we have been praying to a man without considering the role, perspectives, and strength of the woman, Sita. I decided to retell the story in a way that focuses on her journey and perspectives in order to show that the god we have been praying to is not so perfect. I realized I am a storyteller. As designers, we all are.

AP: When did you begin to integrate feminism as a method or a process in your work?

AK: When I was researching for my thesis, I learned about variable fonts, and my mind was blown. I saw so many possibilities because of the breadth of choice and fluidity that variable fonts gave you. That summer I was reading about feminist theory and how to integrate it in design. Something clicked, and I asked myself, "How might I make a font that is feminist? How could I make a tool that is feminist as opposed to just making a stand-alone project?" When I was working on this, I was also working on a project with an organization called Feminism in India [that was] about how gender-based violence is portrayed in media and how usually the victim is shown in a very vulnerable position. We made illustrations where the victim wasn't shown as weak and where the oppressor wasn't shown as a monster because oppressors aren't usually monsters; they're regular people. The illustrations became a part of a media tool kit of open-source imagery that feminism in India has been asking media outlets in India to use instead of using pictures that depict women as weak. I liked the idea of making a "tool" that anyone could use and add to.

FAST COMPANY

12-29-23

Every designer should be a feminist

When design is viewed through a feminist lens, the inherent power structures of the world are revealed.

BY ALISON PLACE 3 MINUTE READ

Design today is troubled—and troubling.

The role of design in our lives has exploded in recent decades to become nearly ubiquitous and almost entirely unavoidable. It mediates our relationships, our work, our communication, our health, our communities, our sense of self. Few if any aspects of our existence are untouched by the design of artifacts, spaces, systems, and technologies. Design is often touted as an intervention for improving or optimizing our lives, which obscures its role in reflecting and perpetuating deeply embedded power structures in society that oppress people, exploit labor, and deplete resources. We tend to overestimate how much of design's negative impact is due to individual designers' implicit bias, while overlooking how deeply entangled it is in complex power structures and deeply rooted systems of oppression.

Occasionally, it is possible to draw a line directly from a decision made by a designer to an instance of blatant oppression, such as automated soap dispensers that don't recognize hands with dark skin or an airport scanning machine that allows bodies to be read only as male or female. But the ways in which design reinforces oppression are most often not so clear, webbed in systems and processes that are much more complex than one ignorant decision. When design is part of the solution, it is also inevitably part of the problem, too.

Social Media

[Left] I use social media to promote each contributor in the book and other relevant content.

[Right] Various social media mentions.