

Un cuadro, una silla

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Sign language

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A good logo is not forgotten. One may not be able to describe it later, it may seem lost in our memory, but as soon as we see it again we immediately recognise it. The author of such signs must concentrate their meaning in such a way that our response to it is instinctive, not rational. While visiting the exhibition of Alberto Corazón at Fundación Telefónica I was astonished at the number of everyday symbols we owe to his almost anonymous invention: Fundación Mapfre, ONCE, Paradores, Tesoro Público, Círculo de Bellas Artes, Cercanías...

Alberto Corazón (Madrid, 1942) is probably the most famous Spanish designer but I only became familiar with his work a few years ago at an [exhibition](#) dedicated to his other vocation, the visual arts. His great aesthetic sensitivity no doubt informs his designs, but he is strict when establishing the differences between both activities: one relies on a client and has a practical end; the other is an act of solitude that is born from one's own memory. "The designer is not an artist, he is a professional," says Corazón. True, though not less true than the fact that not every graphic designer is worthy of a retrospective exhibition. The visual strength and intellectual eloquence of many of Alberto Corazón's designs exceed a mere practical use.

As opposed to art, graphic design has to be able to survive in the real world. The complexity of painting, the attention it requires in order to be fully appreciated, makes it vulnerable to the aggressiveness of an urban landscape where the amount of visual stimuli is overwhelming. As I write this text I can see a small fragment of Madrid's Gran Vía and I am incapable of counting each and every sign that fights for my eyes' attention. In a place like this painting would simply be crushed. Design, on the other hand, however intellectually refined, must know how to adapt to this difficult environment; it must be able to make itself visible in the crowd, to persist in the memory of the rushing passer-by. Both disciplines, design and painting, measure their effectiveness by the time they require to be looked at: good design needs barely a few seconds; if a painting is good, one can revisit it indefinitely.

Good graphic design, unlike art in museums, doesn't suffer from use. It doesn't need a certain magical aura to survive, its value does not lie in being a unique object. Precisely because it is reproducible, because there is no original, design could be subject to the same comparison that Octavio Paz made between painting and craftwork, praising the latter for its live and tactile nature. The graphic work of Alberto Corazón which best applies to this are his books covers. At Telefónica we can see a mosaic

formed by different titles of Visor publishing house's poetry collection which Corazón designed. Something tells me that Corazón, a designer who is also a painter and a writer, must experience a special joy when inventing book covers; the impossible and yet beautiful task of expressing the density of poetry by means of a single image. The collection of books designed by Corazón excites the eye, but I look closer and see the traces of use on their black covers, slight creases on their corners. Unlike a painting, no one will hurry to restore the book to its original state: for a designer, use represents a triumph.

Alberto Corazón says design is a profession in which it is essential to listen. While the artist compromises only with oneself, the designer must pay attention to the needs of the client. One's first impression of an institution, be it a private company or a museum, depends greatly on the designer's work. What he or she provides for the client is not a mere decorative motif but a whole public image, the aesthetic seal everyone will put to their name from then on, the sole image that must stick to the mind of the television viewer, the reader of newspapers, the urban pedestrian. Only now I discover just how many of the symbols my mind has registered and my eyes recognise in an everyday walk through Madrid are the product of a fine job by Alberto Corazón.

[Alberto Corazón. Design: The Energy of Graphic Thought. 1965-2015.](#) Espacio Fundación Telefónica. Fuencarral, 3. Madrid. Until 4 October.



Alberto Corazón in his home.