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The Handy Book of Artistic Printing: Collection of Letterpress Examples with Specimens of Type, Ornament, Corner Fills, Borders, Twisters, Wrinklers, and other Freaks of Fancy

Doug Clouse, Angela Voulangas

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During the late nineteenth century, letterpress printers, engravers, and lithographers boldly challenged the rational sobriety of traditional design by introducing intricate borders, corner embellishments, quirky typefaces, and exotic imagery. The style was known as "artistic" and was quickly taken up by letterpress printers as the design idiom ofchoice for advertisements, packaging, and all of the other ephemera occasioned by the rapid expansion of America's economy. For a while, this commercial style represented the best in popular taste.

But just as quickly as this exuberant style was embraced, it fell abruptly out of favor. By century's end, the ornate bits of artistic printing were tossed into the gutter, and the style itself relegated to the dustbin of history. The rise and fall of this highly embellished idiom, which culminated in its denouncement as aesthetically and morallysuspect"a freak of fancy"are traced in this, the first comprehensive study devoted to the history of American artistic printing. Authors Douglas Clouse and Angela Voulangas explore the style's origins in the British Aesthetic Movement and analyze its distinctive features: idiosyncratic color harmonies, eclectic choice of type andornament, compartmentalized compositional strategies. They also present a landmark portfolio of letterpress printing samples, drawn from some of the most important public and private print archives. More than 150 examples of period ephemera, printers' own tour de force promotional pieces, and specimens of type and ornament are reproduced, many for the very first time since their initial circulation more than a century ago.

The Handy Book of Artistic Printing celebrates a previously berated and today largely forgotten episode of design historyone of increasing interest in light of the recent embrace of ornament by some leading contemporary designers. This book will be of value to graphic designers, but also to fine artists, visual merchandisers, and collectors of ephemera everywhere.

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