

Antwon Key, MFA

ARTIST STATEMENT

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Since concluding the graphic design graduate program at the Vermont College of Fine Arts my research has been on historical and contemporary stereotyping in advertising design. I am focused on how advertising shapes and perpetuates negative stereotypes in our society. I believe that by understanding this and being able to explain it will hopefully help our society for the better.

As a visual communicator, it is easy to work with preexisting concepts that the public can grasp with minimal effort. There are positive stereotypes that are not detrimental to our society. These are very useful when designing mass communication messages for a general audience. Unfortunately, many of these concepts are long held stereotypes, the general assumptions that we all make of each other. Stereotypes are harmful when it is used to portray groups of individuals as comedic relief or worst, the very problem in our society.

It is our obligation as design educators to think about the world in which we live and how our work progresses it. I have begun to ask these questions of myself and other designers about how our work influences society. The images that are repeated over again within the media reinforces damaging stereotypes and further divides us as a nation. To be clear graphic design has not produced these problems but irresponsible design has contributed to allowing this problem to survive well into our modern age.

Stereotyping and the science behind it is a topic that often does not find its way into a design course. For most undergraduates, it is not covered in a classroom setting until they are well into their professional occupations and have designed work that has been called into question as being offensive. It is the responsibility of higher institutions of learning to educate and prepare young designers not only with the principles of design, but also the ethical side of design. This is essential because I strongly believe that design should have a societal benefit for the improvement of humankind.

My goal is to educate design scholars to be aware of how the messaging within their work can influence humanity. No longer do we live in a world where one group's opinion matters. We now live in a more diverse society where the ethnicities or sexual preferences of an individual are not as important as they were ten or twenty years ago. As we create messages for public consumption we must also be sensitive of how those messages can be perceived by the public and whether that message is beneficial to society or not.

As we attempt in the 21st century to move past the ideas of the past, we are often pulling from the hurtful influences of the past. I feel that design should be used for the good of humankind to change our world for the positive and uplift all people regardless of ethnicity or sexual preference.

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